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NAOMI TORRENTE:

THE

HISTORY OF A WOMAN.

JAN. 1898

BY

GERTRUDE F. DE VINGUT.

Every dream of love argues
a reality in the world of supreme
beauty. Believe all that thy heart
prompts, for everything that it
seeks exists.—PLATO.

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New York, May 3, 1864.

Esteemed Friend—

For by this title I may address you, though we have met only in the world of thought, and known each other simply by the exchange of our written ideas. To you, who have rendered into the harmonious language which I love, some of my earlier productions, I dedicate this book. The first years of my youth were linked to one of your compatriots; and around those years cluster the dearest memories of my life. Is it strange, then, if, without sacrificing my nationality, I should look upon the natives of your sunny isle almost as my countrymen? You say in one of the literary productions which from your distant home you had the kindness to send me: "He vivido; he amado; he sufrido" (I have lived, loved, and suffered). It is to you, therefore, and those who like you have deeply felt, that the history of a woman's soul-life will prove more interesting than the mere narrative of the chances and occurrences that make up the every-day, material existence. You will know how to appreciate whatever merit it may possess, and you will be indulgent to its faults for the sake of your friend and fellow laborer in the great field of literature.

G. F. de Vingut.

Sr. Dn. Juan Clemente Zenea,
Editor of *La Charanga*,
Havana.

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NAOMI TORRENTE:

THE HISTORY OF A WOMAN.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

In the small and very modestly furnished parlor of a tiny, but neat and respectable looking house, standing alone, a little beyond the White House, in Washington City, a mother and daughter, sole occupants of the dwelling, with the exception of a servant, were sitting alone one lovely June evening, at the hour of sunset.

The mother, a lady of some forty-five years, reclined in a large easy chair, drawn towards one of the open windows, with her feet resting on a cushion, and from her languid attitude, and the pallor of her face, it was easy to perceive that she was an invalid. She wore a dress of black silk, plainly and loosely made; and a little black lace cap, fitting tightly to her small and beautifully shaped head, softly overlaid the bands of dark brown hair, threaded here and there with silver, that shaded a face that had evidently once been one of rare loveliness.

The young girl was but a few steps off, half kneeling, half sitting on the floor, in a position of childish grace, one arm resting on the sill of the low window, and her eyes fixed on the floating clouds above. Her hair, only moderately redundant, but of silky fineness, and rarely beautiful in color, extremely

dark, yet with warm golden reflections, was slightly disarranged, as though in her abstraction she had pushed it away; and her features, not perfectly regular, yet approaching the antique type in their clear cut but rounded outlines, were plainly visible. The face had the pure Grecian oval. The brow, too, was Grecian, low, broad, and full. The large, well shaped melancholy eyes, were of the sea-blue color that Lamartine loves; the nose, just prominent enough to indicate decision of character, and the mouth had those curved and impressible lines capable of expressing every feeling. Her complexion was olive, soft, and clear, and pale, with that utter paleness which is seldom seen. As she sat, her figure was about the medium height; and her girlish dress of white muslin, low-necked and short-sleeved, showed her neck and arms, that were formed and rounded with wonderful beauty. Her lithe form, slender yet full, possessed all the youthful, innocent grace of her years, combined with something of the voluptuousness of womanhood.

There was intellect in the upturned face, and power and passion, too, not so much undeveloped as held in check by the timidity of her eighteen years; yet, wondrously attractive as such a face and form must have been to one of a refined mind and appreciative taste, such was her shrinking air, such the rapt and melancholy expression of her face when in repose, that she might have passed almost unnoticed in a crowd; and there were doubtless many who would not have called her beautiful.

So absorbed was she in her own thoughts, that she did not perceive that the garden gate opened and shut, and a white-haired old gentleman, of a majestic figure, walked with creaking boots up the gravelled path, and entered the house. A moment after, coming unceremoniously into the parlor, with the familiarity of an old friend, he tossed his hat upon the sofa, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and sitting down, made a significant gesture towards the young girl, as much as to say "There she is again, dreaming as usual."

"Naomi," said her mother, softly, "you don't see the Colonel."

The young girl turned quickly, and with a slight smile parting her lips, inclined her head towards him.

"Ah! child," he said, in his naturally brusque manner, "don't dream. Dreams won't get you bread and butter."

A vivid color mounted suddenly into her cheeks, and after remaining irresolute for a moment, as if she did not know whether to reply or not, she rose abruptly, stepped out of the window upon the piazza, and walked rapidly away.

"A fiery little puss," he said; "she is angry now."

"No, not exactly angry. She is very, very sensitive, and any little jesting remark that others reply to in kind, wounds her so deeply that at the moment she cannot speak. I wish she were not so; but all the circumstances of her past life and her present position tend to increase this disposition and render it almost morbid."

"It is of no use to indulge her in whims; now this notion to become a singer, looking at it in a rational manner, is all nonsense, Mrs. Torrente—all nonsense, and you should not encourage her."

"I don't encourage her, believe me; but it is a very difficult matter to *discourage* her. She has such a passion for music and the stage, she is so enthusiastic, that this thought makes her forget her solitary life, and gives her a hope in the miserably uncertain future. When I see this, it is hard for me to even try to dissuade her from it. You know that she is young and beautiful, but you do not know—few do—that she is full of talent and ambition. Think for a moment of the lonely and aimless life she leads, caged here, seeing the first years of her youth pass away in this useless manner, and then you will not wonder that even I should sometimes think that, could it be accomplished, it might be the best thing for her."

"Ay, if it could be accomplished; there is where the difficulty lies. Let us look at it coolly for a moment. In the first

place, she must have two or three years' tuition under the best masters. There are none here sufficiently good; you would have to go to New York. How would you live there? Then, when fitted for her profession, there would be a wardrobe to obtain; and some person, some relative of course, must needs accompany her on her travels, for you know how roving an artistic life is. Where are the means for all this? Where is the relative to accompany her? Not surely you—an invalid—who often cannot walk alone in your room."

"O, I know the obstacles are very great; but yet these things are managed frequently under perhaps greater difficulties."

"Yes, there is one very easy and practicable plan. Take her to New York: her beauty will insure her an engagement. Find her a boarding-house; young, lovely, and inexperienced—as all are at her age—leave her in that great Babylon alone. That would work beautifully."

"Pray don't talk in that way. Do you imagine for a moment that I would do such a thing? Leave my child—fling her out on the great ocean of the world? Heaven help us! I would rather see her dead."

"I have only spoken so to show you the absurdity of cherishing an utterly impracticable thought. Dismiss it from your mind—my old constant friendship gives me a right to speak to you thus. Why did I not know you in your girlhood? Ah! that leaving your splendid home to share the fortunes of an exiled Cuban was a foolish——"

"Hush!" she said, and the color mounted to her pale cheek. "I never have—never shall regret it. Only when I look at Naomi, my lonely orphan—only then I feel a pang; but not even then regret."

"You will never lose your romance—well, well! But now, as to Naomi, my dear friend, she must get married."

"She does not seem to have the wish to marry that girls generally have; she might have married two years ago, not badly

either, if she would. In our secluded life she has little opportunity of seeing any one calculated to please her."

"Not want to marry! All nonsense again. Don't you see that it is the only thing for her? Do you think she would object to a fine-looking, gentlemanly person, with a good income?"

Mrs. Torrente leaned forward, and slightly lowered her voice as she answered.

"Speak low, Colonel, where is there such a person?"

"Here now—He is a gentleman from New York; an old friend of mine; and he is seeking a wife——with your permission I will bring him here."

"Do you think she would fancy him?"

"That is too much for me to say, indeed. I don't pretend to understand women's vagaries, you can but try—I tell you that he is a gentleman—I have extolled Naomi to him till he is dying to see her."

"Very well, you may bring him, but Naomi must believe it to be entirely an accidental thing. Should she suspect any preconcerted arrangements it would spoil everything."

"Never fear. It shall be to-morrow evening; we are taking a walk, you know, and I stop to inquire after your health. By the way, I have not asked you yet how you do feel?"

"Nervous and feeble, though not quite so much so as usual."

"I must be going now. I wonder where that little Sensitive Plant vanished to. If I were only twenty-five instead of—no matter how much, I would marry her myself, for she is almost as pretty as her mother used to be."

She smiled, and it was strange to see how the smile lit up her faded face with its old pleased, coquettish expression at hearing a compliment, as she said:

"I was pretty once, Colonel, was I not?"

"The prettiest woman I ever saw," he answered, and, adjusting his white locks, he passed leisurely out to the piazza, where Naomi was pacing slowly up and down.

"Good night, little Firebrand," he said, nodding to her and laughing.

"Good night," she answered indifferently, and continued her slow, pensive walk without looking at him.

CHAPTER II.

NINETEEN years before the date of the conversation recorded in the previous chapter, Mrs. Mabel Torrente, eldest daughter of a wealthy and aristocratic Virginia gentleman, fell in love at the mature age of twenty-two, when romantic sentiments have generally given place to prudent and practical considerations, with a poor though intelligent and highly educated Cuban, a political exile from his native land; meeting with the most determined opposition from her family, she took the usual course in such affairs, that is to say—eloped and married him.

Her mother had been dead for years. Her father, a man of stern, unyielding character, would never see her again; and for a long time would not permit her name to be mentioned in his presence.

Mabel accompanied her husband to New York, where, by diligently teaching and translating his native tongue, he was enabled to maintain her in a moderately comfortable manner.

Five years passed thus, and then a child came to them. A little Cuban child, the father said, as he gazed on her olive cheek, and tiny hands and feet. Even as an infant it could be seen that she was heiress of her mother's beauty, grace, and playful fancy, and of her father's strong intellect. They called her Naomi, after a Jewess who had been one of the dearest friends of her mother's girlhood.

The ceaseless tide of time swept ten years more into the great ocean of eternity. Naomi was still their only child; and all their thoughts and wishes centring in the small quiet rooms of some plain boarding-house which constituted their home, they

lived from day to day, careless of the future, as we all are when the heart is satisfied.

It was at this time that Mr. Torrente, who had in reality been ailing for a long time, fell suddenly very seriously ill. In truth, his tropical organization had never been equal to the long, continued exposure to the storms and cold incidental to his profession. The thought of his wife and child gave him courage to battle with disease for a long time; but the hour at last arrived in which, suffering and helpless, he was obliged to abandon everything. Poor, agonized Mabel called in physician after physician; and they were all unanimous in the opinion that in an immediate voyage to Cuba lay the only hope of his recovery. Alas! how difficult of execution was such a project, when their scanty means scarce afforded them a support, even with the most rigid economy. Fortunately Mabel still possessed some valuable trinkets, relics of girlish luxury, by the sale of which she obtained money to defray the expenses of the voyage.

In her confusion and inexpressible anxiety of mind, it was not till all other plans were formed and preparations completed that Mabel bethought her of her child. Should she go with them? If not, where could she be left? Her eyes turned longingly towards her father's home. Ah! if her child could but find refuge in the bosom of her family! That thought was vain; but, pondering on the almost insurmountable obstacles to taking her with them, the want of adequate means, the danger to the child's health of a tropical climate, and the impossibility, chained as she was to her husband's bed-side, of properly caring for her, she wrote finally to her sister, a wealthy widow residing in Washington, stated the circumstances, and begged her advice.

An answer came by return of mail, written with the impulsive kindness of heart that characterized Mrs. Changerton. She would take charge of the child during their absence; and she would do so with more readiness and pleasure, as her only

daughter, Mary, was but two years Naomi's senior, and they would be as sisters to each other.

Mrs. Torrente was relieved of part of her great burden, spite of the anguish of parting with her child. She stole for two days from her husband's side, and took Naomi to Mrs. Changerton's house. There, after the lapse of so many years, she tearfully embraced her sister, and kissed for the first time her niece and nephews. Earnestly, solemnly, she said to her sister:

"Oh! Ada, be a mother to my child in my absence, and pray that God may restore her parents to her."

Then, taking the frightened, low-sobbing Naomi upon her agonized bosom for a few brief moments, she soothed her with caresses and tender words, and then, with a great effort, put her down and rose to go. Naomi did not cling to her mother, as almost any other child would have done under such circumstances. Young as she was, her quick intelligence taught her the uselessness of striving to prevent, or even delay, what was inevitable. She stood quite still, her bowed head hidden by her little hands, weeping silently, but yet with unrestrained and passionate grief. Her mother knelt beside her, held her to her breast for one moment longer, and, not daring to hazard another look, hurried away. Two days after Mrs. Changerton showed Naomi the names of her parents among the list of passengers for Havana.

CHAPTER III.

In her own home, where every reproof had been tempered by affection, and every restraint had been so gentle and salutary that it never galled in the least her proud and sensitive nature, Naomi's childish character had developed itself as harmoniously as a flower blooms under the favoring circumstances of air, and warmth, and light. The tinge of melancholy inherent in her organization was only at times visible in the meditative and dreamy aspect of her sweet face; and for the most part she was freely and frankly joyous, sometimes even hoydenish in her innocent glee. She was wont to creep to her father's or mother's knee, or sit at their feet and tell them every little thought or feeling of her guileless heart; or rather, as they used to say, think aloud to them. Such was Naomi when she entered her aunt's household; and as the fresh, fragrant plant, torn from its native soil, and deprived of genial warmth and freshening breeze, pales, droops, and closes in upon itself, even so in the chill of melancholy and desolation that fell upon her in this strange atmosphere, the child's heart shut in all its old happy impulses.

Mrs. Changerton, still young and very pretty, was vain, coquettish, extravagant, and ruled by no governing principle of right; she was kind-hearted, generous, devoted to those she loved; yet, swayed by every impulse, whether good or evil, she had no sense of justice. Mary, her daughter, a girl of twelve years old, was already almost a woman, and was also exceedingly pretty. She was intelligent, and her education was more than usually advanced for one of her years; but her character was cold, selfish, and arbitrary. Accustomed to rule everything in

her mother's household, she could not brook the slightest opposition to her will, which her mother, in her blind adoration, had taught her to consider law.

Mrs. Changerton had two sons, innocent little creatures, without any distinguishing traits of character.

Introduced into this great house, Naomi did not need to be told: "You are to understand that you are a dependent, and not at home here; you are not to move unrestrainedly about this house; not too freely examine the luxurious appointments of these apartments; your aunt will be kind to you, that is to say, she will not abuse you unless you provoke her in some untoward mood; but your arms may never venture to steal around her neck, your lips may never press her cheek. As to your cousin Mary, all the ingenuity of nature and art could never manufacture a barrier so utterly, hopelessly impassable as the invisible one that rears itself between you and her." No, Naomi, intensely susceptible of impressions, did not need *to be told this, she felt it*—felt it in the sense of restraint and bondage that were around her like unseen but mighty chains; in the lifeless, colorless aspect of everything about her—even, it seemed to her, in the cold, life-denying air she breathed. Worse than all, to a nature like hers, was the conviction, not arrived at by reasonings, but *felt* like the rest, that her affections, wishes, nay even her life itself, were matters of little or no importance to those around her.

Time passed—letters came from Mrs. Torrente—her husband was slightly, very slightly better; but still utterly unable to attend to anything like business. It was only through her desperate efforts, tearing herself from his side when his voice called on her alone, that she obtained by teaching English means for their support; for Mr. Torrente was an orphan, and his few living relations were poor. There was a long letter for Naomi, where the mother's heart cried out for her child with yearning love. To read it over and over again, and wear it in her bosom, and sleep with it beneath her pillow, were the poor child's only consolations.

And so as months rolled away bringing always the same news from Cuba; and time developed and consolidated the antagonistic relations the household had assumed towards her on her entrance, strange changes and contrasts were germinated in Naomi's character.—The constant sneering criticisms of words, and looks, and actions; harsh, despotic chidings; or worse still, utter neglect; the arrogant sweeping around her of disdainful robes, sweeping her into nothingness as it were; gradually engendered within her a bitter self-depreciation and self-distrust, mingled with a haughty, rebellious, and defiant pride, two feelings directly opposed in their nature, and both unnatural at her age. An overpowering timidity which froze upon her lips the expression of her thoughts and feelings, and a fierce spirit of resistance, took possession of her. Swayed generally by the first feeling, which was becoming the ruling influence of her life, her cold and unnaturally repressed manner indicated only to an acute observer, the misgiving heart that was fast losing faith in itself; and yet, when stung by her cousin's sly sneers or open insults, her smothered resentment burst forth in the bitterest retorts her precocious intellect could frame.

At this time, Mrs. Changerton sent her to school with Mary, and with the strange influences at work upon her, this was a new source of torment to the sensitive child. Beside her father's knee, she had learned all that she knew. A few gentle, quiet words from him had explained to her the first principles of grammar and arithmetic, and something of the facts of history; and her quick intelligence, encouraged by his judicious praise, had instantly mastered them; but she had never entered into competition with a class; had never seen laughing, bold-faced girls staring at her as she opened her mouth to reply to a question, ready with the quick whisper and laugh if she hesitated an instant. If, in her happiest days, this would have been a trial to her, how much more so was it now when suffering from this fatal timidity, which, when it came upon her in its intensity, took away her senses for the moment, leaving her only conscious

of the rushing blood that dyed her face, and the trembling hands she would fain have hidden.

No one sought her, and she sought no one—she did not dare —who cared for her? and yet, why was it that she was thus separated from all? When the bell rang for the hour of recreation, each girl found her companion, or companions. Only she remained sitting alone at her desk. Only she, if she wandered to the playground, would be left standing like a statue, watching the sports of the others. She was unlike them. Oh! so unlike them. It did not seem to her that they ever had one thought or feeling in common. She was vaguely impressed with a sense of their superiority. They were happier, better, lovelier—they must be. How spontaneous were their joyous bursts of laughter—and she? There was no spontaneity in her; her childish soul was bound in icy fetters. No inhabitant of another sphere dropped in their midst by accident could be more alien from them.

Thus it came to pass that, restrained by morbid timidity, depressed by self-distrust, and stimulated by no ambition, Naomi abhorred school; and by a very natural consequence, abhorred the lessons she had to recite there. Returning from its hated confines to the still more hated abode she called her home, she invariably hastened to the little room allotted to her, where, had she been permitted, she would gladly have remained for ever alone, and there, with door closed and locked, school-books were thrown aside, and some novel, borrowed or picked up about the house, substituted in their stead. Novels read at an age when principles are formed and judgment matured are never dangerous; and when they are of the kind that paints life as it *really is*, are of infinite use in enlarging the mind, and enlivening the fancy. Such novels are but histories, in an entertaining form, of human life and human nature, and cannot fail to instruct. But to a child, ignorant of itself and of the world, and consequently without any fixed ideas on any subject, there can be nothing more pernicious than the romances that fall in one's way; works which, without moral or literary merit, corrupt the

heart, and vitiate the taste. With no one to guide her reason, or control her through her feelings, Naomi peopled her solitude with imaginary beings, to whose control, whether for good or evil, she blindly surrendered herself. Devotion had ever been a strong element in her nature. Many and many a time, at some trifling illness of father or mother, she had stolen aside and prayed earnestly for them with all the simple-hearted faith of a child; but now resentment, misanthropy, almost hatred, had so darkened the world within her, that the pure, peaceful light of religion could not illumine it. In after years, when the serene light of hope had again dawned in her heart, dispelling the shadows of that long, dreary night, Naomi looked back with a kind of terror at the dark, dangerous path her little reckless feet had so desperately trodden. Surely some benign though unseen influence hovered around her, keeping green and vital the germ of elevated thoughts, noble purposes, and pure affections which Heaven had placed within her.

Nothing of all this wrote she to her mother. It would but make her more unhappy, and she could neither come nor send for her; of what use then would it be to complain?

CHAPTER IV.

THUS one—two—three years dragged their slow lengths along. Mr. Torrente's health had never materially improved; and of late, her mother wrote, he began to droop more and more. Then news came that he was very, very ill; but Mrs. Torrente still clung to the blind, wilful hope of a woman who loves, and cannot believe it possible that the loved one can go from her. Naomi had never seen death. The crushing weight of hopeless, impotent sorrow had never fallen on her, and she could not comprehend or believe in it. The next letter would tell her that her father was better.

A fortnight after, she was alone in her room as usual, lying upon a couch, and absorbed in one of her favorite books, when there was a quick double rap at the door. Without moving she asked indifferently, "Who's there?"

The knock was impatiently repeated, and a voice cried, "Open! open! open!"

Oh! how the heart leapt up! With what a bound she gained the door and flung it wide! Ah! it was all gone, that miserable weary time—gone like a hideous nightmare that the morning light dispels; gone—or rather it had never been; an innocent, loving, joyous child again, Naomi lay once more upon her mother's bosom.

It was long ere either spoke. The mother only knew her arms were round her child; the child was only conscious of their fond, long-yearned-for clasp. At last, tenderly raising Naomi's drooping head, and with both hands pressing the pale, tear-stained cheeks, the mother said falteringly:

"My child! my own! my *all* now. Thank God that I have lived to see your sweet face again!"

At these words Naomi started, and *remembered.* Glancing anxiously, fearfully around, she said in a hesitating tone:

"Papa, dear mamma, is he here?"

But there was no answer save that conveyed by her mother's low-bowed head and choking sobs, and then Naomi knew that far, far away her father had fallen asleep for ever.

CHAPTER V.

When the first vehemence of her sorrow had worn away, Mrs. Torrente began to notice the change that had come over her child. She had grown but little, and her form, though always exquisitely symmetrical, was still entirely undeveloped; but the face had changed. Gone were the old, sweet, dimpling smiles; gone the dreamy, tender glance of the dark eyes. Cold, hard, almost stony in its rigidity, her face betrayed no thought or feeling; and her manner, too, was full of the same matured repression. Mrs. Torrente observed with anxiety that though haunting her footsteps like a shadow, Naomi never crept to her side in the familiar way of yore, and with her arms about her, told her all that had happened during their long separation. Soon, however, her evident dislike to her aunt, and her defiant manner to Mary, gave the mother an inkling of the truth. They were alone one day, and gently taking her child upon her knee, she said:

"Naomi, you are changed, my darling; so changed that I should scarcely know my child. You should have no secrets from your mother—your mother who loves only you in this wide world, and would do anything for your happiness. Come! put your arms around my neck, and tell me all."

She was obeyed; and with a great passion of tears the pent up heart was loosened, and poured forth its history of neglect, pain, and humiliation.

From that time confidence was in a great degree restored between mother and child; though it was long before the darkness of those evil years passed entirely from Naomi's soul.

Where should the lonely, friendless widow and child find a

home? How the mother suffered in revolving this thought in her mind, day and night! At last she took the desperate resolution to seek her father, and appeal for aid to the love he once bore her.

Unannounced, she stood trembling, and with a sinking heart, in the rooms where she had played as a child; and sending word simply that a lady wished to see Mr. Stateford, dreadingly awaited his presence. Almost unaltered, save that his once black hair was nearly white now, he entered; and his daughter rose and stood before him. His eyes rested indifferently on her; he could not recognise in that careworn woman, the beautiful, blooming Mabel of other years; but she, overpowered by the flood of memories that rushed upon her, had, almost before she was herself aware of it, thrown her arms about him, and called him, "Father!"

His first impulse was to push her from him; but the wailing vibrations of her voice were in his ear; her tears were on his cheek; and her sombre dress suggested the misfortune that had overwhelmed her. He struggled for a moment, and then silently pressed her to his bosom.

In brief words, she told him all:—

"I have no friend on earth save you," she said in conclusion, "to whom I can look for assistance. You surely will not, cannot see me starve with my poor child."

"I care not for your child," he answered, bitterly; "I hate too much the memory of the man who wrested from me my best-beloved child to consign her to a life of poverty, to take any interest whatever in *his* child. You say rightly, that I cannot see *you* starve. You shall have a small house in Washington, and an allowance sufficiently large to live comfortably upon. For *your* sake, and *while you live*, it shall be large enough to sustain your child also, but *mark*, *only during your life*. At your death, it will revert to the regular heirs."

"Ah!" sighed the poor mother, "if you could but see her!"

"I will never see her," he answered determinately. "Come and see me when you will, but let it be *alone*."

Though she had obtained far more than she had ever dared to hope, yet her father's utter rejection of her child lay heavy at her heart, as she took possession of the little but comfortable home his kindness had granted her.

CHAPTER VI.

Once fairly settled in their new abode, their grief-worn hearts reposing on each other, an interval of calm and rest commenced for them, which, apart from her anxiety for the future of her child, was happiness to the mother, and, for a long time at least, very grateful to Naomi.

Mrs. Torrente devoted herself to her daughter's education. She succeeded in imparting to her a very good knowledge of her own and the Spanish language, which she herself spoke and wrote like a native; taught her to play upon the piano with taste and expression; and cultivated as much as possible the powerful and extensive voice with which nature had endowed Naomi—a voice wondrously full of melody, melancholy, and passion.

In this unvaried existence, which was only redeemed from monotony by her love for her mother, and the bright, unsubstantial dreams belonging to her years, Naomi gradually regained her old sweetness of temper, and nobleness of heart. Only at times were the traces of her painful experience visible in her extreme sensitiveness, and the old miserable sense of self-distrust. There was yet one other thing acquired or developed in those unhappy days, which, in a certain sense, might be said to be advantageous, and this was the habit of guarding her innermost feelings from every eye; she never was, never could be as unreservedly confidential as before; and this, as far as the world was concerned, was a great piece of wisdom early learned. Happy are those who do not wear their "heart upon their sleeve for daws to peck at."

Naomi at fifteen, was still so undeveloped in form, and shrink-

ing in manner, that she looked scarcely more than twelve. She ever possessed great maturity of thought and character, but there are few eyes penetrating enough to pierce the veil of exteriors.

The only events worthy of record during these years were the death of Mrs. Torrente's father, and Mrs. Changerton's removal to New York.

Mrs. Torrente visited no one absolutely, as neither her inclinations prompted, nor did her circumstances permit her to keep up a circle of acquaintances; and received only a few, old, valued friends, who could dispense with all ceremony. Added to this, her health had begun to fail, and it was becoming a difficult task for her to leave her home.

Quite unexpectedly, one day, she received a note from Mrs. Raphael, her oldest, dearest friend, for whom Naomi had been named, announcing her arrival at one of the principal hotels of the city. Mrs. Torrente was so delighted, that on the impulse of the moment she roused, and went with Naomi to pay her a visit. It was an affectionate and joyous meeting for the old friends; and the young girl found it an agreeable novelty to gaze around the gay drawing-rooms.

There was a gentleman talking to Mrs. Raphael when they entered, who was presented to them by the name of Mr. Ashwood. He was, judging from his appearance, a mixture of Jew and Christian. He had an intelligent face, fine dark eyes, a manly form, and a very easy and engaging address.

Finding himself opposite to Naomi, he endeavored to draw her into conversation, but in vain. The timid girl did not dare to raise her eyes to his; and her low-voiced replies were scarcely audible. When her mother rose to take leave, she ventured to steal a look at him, and it might have been the encounter of his full deep gaze that so suddenly flushed her cheek.

Mrs. Raphael returned Mrs. Torrente's visit, and as it was in the evening that she came, and she was a widow, and needed an escort, she brought Mr. Ashwood with her. Partly in compliment to her friend, and partly because she found him very intel-

ligent and companionable, Mrs. Torrente tendered him an invitation to visit them; and after Mrs. Raphael had left the city, he availed himself of it, though rarely, and always maintaining his intimacy on exactly the same footing of respectful, and even rather distant friendship.

From the first, the evenings of his visits were events in Naomi's life. He rarely ever addressed his conversation to her, and she was well pleased that he should not, for she was always embarrassed for a reply. He had travelled much, and with sketches of persons and places he had seen, he would amuse her mother by the hour. Then, Naomi, sitting quietly apart, affecting to be busied with a book of prints, or some other trifle, would watch the varying expression of his face, and his graceful manner; and listened with intense pleasure to the modulations of his harmonious voice. It was only sometimes that his glance wandered towards her, and then, with her own eyes downcast, she could *feel* it as long as it rested upon her.

When he rose to go, she always felt an almost irresistible desire to detain him, for it seemed to her that he took away with him the sunlight of her life, leaving everything cold and dark, till it should be again illumined by his presence.

Yet, who that saw her, so childish in appearance, with her dress to the ankle, and her simply braided hair, sitting so quietly there, so calmly, so smilingly saying "Good night," could have imagined the feelings that inwardly agitated her? Certainly not Mr. Ashwood, who looked upon her as a pretty child; and never for a moment dreamed that aught but childish feelings had ever entered her bosom.

Naomi, herself, was entirely unconscious of the nature of her emotions. She only knew that there was a new gladness in life; a new feeling upon her, filling her being with ineffable contentment.

This lasted for about four months, and might have gone on heaven knows how long, had not an unexpected event enlightened her as to the cause of her innocent happiness.

It was one day, on a return from a long, solitary walk, that she found Mr. Ashwood sitting with her mother. With his usual sweet, engaging smile, he rose, and bowed, and placed a chair for her. She thanked him in a low voice, and sat down.

"We are going to lose Mr. Ashwood, dear," the mother said, in a tone of regret. "He leaves this afternoon for New York."

"To return?" The words burst impetuously from her lips; and almost for the first time her eyes sought his. He smiled, and turned his laughing glance on Mrs. Torrente.

"Why, Naomi," her mother said, responding to his smile, "our friend is going to seek his bride, and will, probably, reside hereafter in New York."

Proud young heart! how bravely it bore the sudden blow. She was conscious of a gnawing pain within; and knew from the cold, dizzy feeling upon her, that she must have paled. Her only coherent thought was, gratitude to heaven that it was nearly dusk, and that her back was toward the light.

Fortunately, her usual manner was so quiet, that neither her mother nor Mr. Ashwood wondered at her making no remark. They exchanged a few more words, and then he rose to go. Naomi, too, rose; and when he turned to her, laid her little cold hand in his, without a word; and then, like one in a dream, watched him pass from the room.

Her heart was swollen, almost to bursting. She must give vent to her feelings. She must be alone. Not daring to trust herself to speak, she was moving toward the door, when her mother said:—

"After you take off your things, dear, come down."

She nodded, yes; and with a rapid step reached her own room. There, with door closed and locked, the first beautiful golden cloud of her existence dissolved in bitter tears, the first and the last; though it was many and many a day before the memory of her first love (for love it surely was) wore away;

many and many a day before any other feeling of the same nature came to take its place.

Mrs. Torrente never suspected that Naomi had cared aught for Mr. Ashwood. *She* never mentioned his name. Buried in the profoundest recesses of her heart, his image silently lived, insensibly saddening everything around, until it was at last effaced by time's irresistible hand.

CHAPTER VII.

More slowly, more wearily dragged the time after this. Naomi's serenity was gone. She began to compare her monotonous and isolated existence with that of other young girls. Even her tender and devoted love for her mother was not sufficient to supply the needs of her ardent heart and ever active intellect. What was to be her destiny?

At seventeen, Naomi's form, so slow in maturing, had developed all its rare perfections.—Slender, yet full and rounded; the chiselled neck; the firm, self-supporting bust, and delicate waist; the tapering limbs, and tiny hands and feet, would have rendered her a fit model for a Grecian statue.

As her mother told Colonel Familiar, she might have married at this age; married, too, in a way that the world calls well. Her suitor was a man much older than herself, without accomplishments of mind or graces of person, yet possessing in a certain line, more than ordinary talent, and with a fair income that promised one day to be wealth.

Mrs. Torrente, who found herself declining from day to day, thought with such terror of being torn from her child, leaving her utterly friendless, that she was half inclined, though her woman's nature shrank with sympathetic loathing from the idea, to favor the encouragement of his views. Influenced insensibly by her mother to a certain degree, Naomi received his visits; and though her involuntarily frozen manner so chilled him, that he had never dared to touch her hand, or speak one word to express the material feeling of which alone he was capable, and which he dignified with the name of love; yet she, in this way, almost unknowingly led him to believe, that at some future day his suit might be accepted.

One evening, from some cause bolder than usual, he followed Naomi as she rose from her mother's side, and walked to one of the windows, and with a blundering attempt at an expression of endearment, made a movement to pass his arm about her. With an indescribable sense of disgust, she recoiled, and lifting her eyes to his, with a vivid flash in their usually quiet depths, turned away, and sought a seat alone. He joined Mrs. Torrente, and entered into conversation to hide his confusion.

Unobserved, in her dark corner, Naomi sat for several minutes in a violent inward conflict.—Should she let this go on? Should she permit herself to be drawn gradually, insensibly, into relations so utterly abhorrent to every thought, every sentiment, every sensation of her being? Could she ever, under any combination of circumstances, become the wife of a man, whose lightest touch, in a caressing form, so revolted her, so stirred up within her antagonism, and even evil? Would not penury, humiliation, death itself be better than that?—Everything in her nature clamored "yes!" She leaped to her feet, and with a rapid step quitted the room.

When twenty minutes had passed and she did not return, Mrs. Torrente rang, and sent to inquire where she was. The servant brought back the answer, that Miss Naomi was not well, and had gone to bed.

She accomplished her object. That was her suitor's last visit.

A passionate love of art, in all its forms, and especially of music and the drama, were, in truth, inherent in Naomi's nature. Reading, in the papers of the day, the brilliant triumphs of great artistes, she began to dream of an artistic career for herself. To dream of it, but as vaguely, as impractically, as sitting alone at twilight we dream of some far smiling land beyond the clouds. She thought not of its toils and pains, its temptations and dangers; she saw only the crowns of flowers, the flashing jewels, its brilliancy, luxury, and excitement, so well suited to a nature at once intellectual and voluptuous, stoical and epicurean.

Chance, Mrs. Torrente said, had developed this feeling in her; but there are things in life that would seem to denote the hand of fate rather than that of blind hazard. Be that as it may, it was thus it came to pass.

CHAPTER VIII.

One morning, quite early, Mrs. Torrente feeling better, and consequently more active than usual, was moving about her bed-chamber, Naomi had just finished arranging her mother's hair, and was smoothing her own before the mirror, when the servant came to say, that a gentleman wished to see Mrs. Torrente.

"A gentleman? Who can it be? Go down, my dear, and see."

Naomi descended. A tall, slender gentleman, about thirty-five years old, an entire stranger to her, was standing in the parlor door.

"You wish to see my mother, sir?" Naomi said, with that sweet, modest self-possession which she had lately begun to acquire, "she is not very well. Please, have the goodness to tell me your business."

"I am afraid," he answered, "that it is out of your power to attend to it. If possible, I should like to speak to her for one moment."

"Take a seat, then, if you please, and I will tell her."

During the interchange of these few words, the only tangible impression Naomi had received of the stranger, and that without knowing why, was that he possessed a great deal of assurance. She remained quietly above, quite uninterestedly, while her mother descended. In spite of Naomi's invitation, the gentleman was still standing when Mrs. Torrente entered the room. He bowed, and when she motioned him to a seat, sat down.

"Madame," said he, commencing the conversation with the ease and readiness of a man of the world, "the object of my visit will surprise you very much, I know, but, I trust, not offend

you. I am seeking a quiet room in some small private family where there are no children, where I may, uninterruptedly, pursue a literary task I have on hand.

"I know that you are not in the habit of letting rooms, but as it is simply for a kind of study, and only for a short time that I desire one, I have thought you might depart from your general custom, as this is, in every respect, the most suitable place I have found."

Mrs. Torrente was certainly surprised, and her face showed it. "Yet," mused she, "our income is so small, if I could by letting a room obtain a little surplus money for Naomi's wardrobe."

"It is a thing I have never done, sir," she said hesitatingly, "and then—you will excuse me—we are entire strangers to each other."

He drew a pocket-book from his pocket, took a card from it, and handed it to her, saying simply:—

"You may possibly have heard the name."

"Henry Fairford," said Mrs. Torrente, thoughtfully, "it seems to me I *have* heard the name. Oh! I remember now. It was a long while ago, some nine or ten years, but I recollect now perfectly. I heard you deliver a lecture in New York."

He bowed assentingly.

"And I never shall forget," continued Mrs. Torrente, "how delighted both myself and my poor husband were with your eloquence, sir."

He bowed again.

"You are kind enough to flatter me, madame—I am all the happier to deserve your good opinion, as it will enable you to pardon more readily the liberty I have taken."

"How well, how very well, I remember that evening," continued she, carried away by her reminiscences, "we were both so delighted with your address; and afterwards we spoke of you so often, that you seem to me now like an old friend more than a stranger. Times have changed, very sadly changed with me since those days."

"To me, also, madame. I was just commencing my career then, and life wore to me the joyous aspect it does to all at the outset. Pardon me—may I ask your husband's name?"

"Torrente, sir; that is his portrait."

"The name is familiar to me, and so is the face. Stay, I think, I am sure I do remember that on one occasion, at one of my lectures, probably the one to which you refer, I particularly noticed this gentleman; partly on account of his own fine appearance, but more because there was a young and very beautiful lady at his side."

The compliment was not disagreeable, though, of late years, she had so seldom heard one, that it was rather confusing. She smiled, and passed her handkerchief over the eyes moistened by the memory of lost happiness.

"Since accident has thrown you in my way here, sir, and since I cannot by any means consider you as a stranger, you shall have the room you wish. This little back parlor, which we do not use, will answer your purpose very well, I presume."

"Perfectly, madame. All the furniture I require is a table and a chair. As to terms, we will not speak of them; any price you see fit to set, will be agreeable to me. When may I take possession?"

"When you please, sir."

"This afternoon, or to-morrow morning, then. Good morning, madame."

When Mrs. Torrente returned to her room, she was more excited than Naomi had seen her for a long time. Relating to her what had passed, she said:—

"If you could but hear him speak, child, you would be carried away by his eloquence. He is full of intellect, and when I first saw him, was very handsome."

"He is not handsome now," Naomi answered indifferently.

"No, he is greatly changed in appearance. But if he spare time from his literary labors to give us a little of his society,

you, who so worship intellect, will be delighted with his conversation, and the charm of his manner."

"I did not see anything charming about him," was the reply, "and I don't believe I shall ever like him."

"I always thought you did not admire a foppishly handsome gentleman, child."

"Neither do I, mamma. But if I should not like Mr. Fairford, you will like him enough for both of us."

Mr. Fairford took possession of his study that afternoon. Entirely ignorant of the fact, and quite forgetful of him, Naomi, about an hour after dinner, wandering pensively down stairs, saw the gentleman standing in the door of his room.—It might have been a wish to test what her mother said of him; or a wish, very natural at her age, and likely to be rendered doubly strong by her isolated life, to converse with one of the opposite sex, possessing at least the attributes of a gentleman; or it might have been a latent spirit of coquetry; at any rate, be it what it might, Naomi returned his respectful bow with a sweet smile, and half paused at the foot of the stairs as though she expected to be addressed. The staircase terminated almost exactly at his door, and standing precisely where they did, they were near enough to converse. He, drawing a step nearer, commenced the conversation.

"Miss Torrente, your mother has been so good as to look upon me almost as a friend; may I not hope that her daughter will not regard me as an entire stranger?"

"Oh! mamma has spoken to me of your eloquence with great enthusiasm, I assure you, Mr. Fairford; and my mother's friends are mine."

"She looks as though her health were broken—is it so?"

"Oh! yes, poor mamma suffers a great deal. Every day she is obliged to lie down two or three hours after dinner."

"And you are all alone then? What do you do with yourself?"

"Sometimes I walk out; sometimes play; at others, read;

and occasionally," with a faint tinge of pink on the soft cheek, "occasionally write."

"Ah!" he said, with a mischievous smile, "I was not aware that I had a literary rival here; though I might almost have guessed as much from those books—yours of course?"

As he turned to point to them, she drew near the door, and when he placed a chair for her, and making some remark about one of the works upon the bookcase, crossed the room to get it, she sat down without the remotest idea that she was committing the slightest impropriety. Mrs. Torrente, reared in the country, and never moving in society after her marriage, had not known anything of the severe restraints customary in city life. Naturally, therefore, Naomi, educated in the most profound seclusion, accustomed to act always freely, impulsively, though ever modestly, and without a thought of evil, was completely ignorant of all the thousand quibbles by which society constantly proclaims its own want of purity. Besides this, habituated to wander through the house at her will, she could not at first realize that, for a time at least, this apartment belonged to a gentleman. Mr. Fairford, a man of large experience and great powers of perception, read all this at a glance; moreover, her manner, with its rare mixture of childishly innocent unconsciousness, and firm collected self-guarding, seemed to say: "I do not know anything about you; am not sure that you are good; but you shall not throw me off my guard, and I do not fear you." He saw, too, or fancied he saw, that her heart was accessible through the medium of her intellect, and this intellectual eloquent man, this polished and elegant gentleman of society concentrated all the force of his intelligence, brought to bear every attraction of manner at his command—he who had so often without an effort charmed a listening circle—to bewilder the imagination of this young girl, this almost child, who had already awakened within him sensations unlike any he had ever experienced before. She, for her part, as she listened to his words full of mind, uttered in a voice modulated with irresistible eloquence, saw his face—the

face she had thought so plain and uninteresting—light with enthusiasm into positive beauty, and observed a certain indescribable something of high-bred elegance in his manner, which appealed powerfully to the dash of aristocratic haughtiness inherent in her own nature, felt her very soul expand, and all her heart seemed to open spontaneously to confide to him its secret aspirations. Her first impression was so completely obliterated that if she had remembered it at all, it would have been simply to wonder on what it was founded, and by what possibility she ever could have had it. He, even while seemingly absorbed in the conversation, was watching the color burning brighter and brighter in her cheeks, and her dark eyes growing more and more brilliant, and saying to himself, "What an organization is this, what earnestness, vehemence, and enthusiasm; and what force of intellect, what strength of will to subjugate it to lead the loveless, aimless life that apparently is hers? The irrepressible longing of her heart and imagination must consume her."

They had been speaking of art and literature when he suddenly said:—

"Some of those closely-written sheets of foolscap, Miss Torrente, I must positively see them."

"Please, do not call me Miss *Torrente*. Every one says Miss *Naomi*, and the other sounds strangely to me. As to showing anything of that kind to you it is impossible."

"And why?"

"Because—because you are a great man."

"Oh! you are going to convert me into a statue, and set me up on a pedestal. No, no, Miss Naomi, let me come down and walk by your side like a common mortal—not meaning though that *you* are a *common* mortal, for indeed you are a very *uncommon* one. I simply mean, that you should talk to me as frankly and naturally as you would to any one of your school-girl friends."

"I have no school-girl friends; no lady acquaintances even."

"Well, then, as you would speak to the most favored of your thousand admirers."

"Worse and worse," laughed she, "I have neither admirers nor gentlemen visitors."

He looked at her with astonishment.

"You are surely jesting," he said; "if you have never lived in society, where have you acquired your rare conversational abilities?"

It was the first time Naomi had ever been told that she possessed them.

"I think you are flattering me, sir; but, at any rate, I have told you only the simple truth. During the time mamma and I have lived here, almost five years, we have led the most utterly—utterly solitary life of which it is possible to conceive."

"But surely there have been some interruptions to it?"

"Yes, there was a person, not in any way congenial with *me*, who wished—wished—that I should marry him. I grew disgusted soon, and despatched him."

"And," fixing his keen eye earnestly, almost anxiously upon her, "has there never been any one more congenial, more agreeable to you?"

"There was one gentleman, a Mr. Ashwood, a friend of mamma's. He was very agreeable and interesting; but it was only for a short time that he visited us; he got married, and went away."

What a sudden shadow had dimmed her bright face—how sadly her eyelids drooped, and suffered the long lashes to sweep her cheek! His face, too, had grown grave, and his voice, when he spoke, had lost an almost imperceptible something of its sonorous steadiness.

"Ah! Miss Naomi—Miss Naomi, there was something more than friendship there. Come, be frank, was there not?"

"No," she said coldly, lifting her eyes, "I liked him, that was all. Do you think I would love a man whose affections were another's? Besides this, I was only a child. Two years

have passed, and even had I loved him, I should have forgotten him now."

"Natures like yours, Miss Naomi, do not forget. Their memories slumber sometimes, but never die."

"And why?"

"Because in an earnest, steady nature like yours, any impression capable of affecting you in any way, must inevitably be profound—so profound as to become an integral part of yourself."

"How do you know so much about me?" she asked smilingly.

"There, on your smooth brow, in the depth of your steady eyes, in your curved mouth, your character is written. It does not require much penetration to read what is so plain."

What was the strong influence that this man exercised over her? How was it she permitted him to see things she would fain have concealed from every eye—permitted him to see them, and that, too, without regret? His eyes were resting on her with an expression that confused her; turning her own in another direction, she caught sight of the work he had brought from the stand: it was a book of dramas. His glance had followed hers.

"So you read dramas, Miss Naomi?"

"Yes, I read anything I choose; and I am passionately fond of dramas; and the stage has an irresistible attraction for me; so much so, indeed, that I have thought of—of adopting it as a profession."

"Adopting it as a profession," he repeated slowly, and then he exclaimed enthusiastically, "why it is what you were born for. With that form like a statue of ancient Greece; with that face capable of expressing everything, why not decide, and do it at once?"

She sighed.

"For one thing, mamma does not entirely approve it; and then—and then—"

He waited for a minute, but the sentence was not finished.

"Well, what then?" he said.

With drooping lids, and a slight proud flush on her cheek,

"Ah! well, there are obstacles."

His keen eye had already penetrated them; but, with an effort, he repressed the words that rose to his lips, and said slowly, watching the effect produced on her, "Bye—and—bye, when we know each other better, you will explain them to me, and we will see if they cannot all be overcome."

She looked at him with a sudden irresistible gratitude for his interest in her eyes, and said earnestly:

"I do so love music. Without ever having seen an opera, I can conceive the bewildering excitement of performing one. They say, too, that I have a fine voice."

While she had been speaking, a slow step had descended the stairs, and paused at the door. Naomi heard it now, and made a movement to rise, but Mr. Fairford, anticipating her, offered his arm to Mrs. Torrente and led her to a seat.

Naomi did not blush or start. It never occurred to her that her mother might be annoyed at finding her engaged in a tête-à-tête conversation in the room of so fascinating a man as Mr. Fairford. With a frank, tender smile she drew near her mother, and leaned on the back of her chair.

"So my naughty child has beguiled you from your labors, Mr. Fairford," Mrs. Torrente said.

"Say rather, madame, that my dull brain has been inspired by her charming presence," he answered with a gallant bow to Naomi.

"Naomi, darling," said her mother turning to her, "while I rest here for one moment, will you see if Martha is getting tea?"

The young girl, avoiding the encounter of a pair of dark blue expressive eyes, pressed her lips upon her mother's cheek, and quitted the room.

Mr. Fairford rose, and took two or three rapid turns up and

down the room, then suddenly pausing before Mrs. Torrente, he said :—

"You may have had, you may have many—many sorrows, but you have one great invaluable consolation—a beautiful and gifted daughter."

The mother's eyes suffused with tears, as she answered :—

"You cannot know what a tender and devoted daughter she is, sir. I might almost say, that I make up her life, as she does mine. Indeed, sometimes, it pains me to think what an isolated existence she leads, but,"—with an expression of profoundly sorrowful resignation,—"we must submit to the will of Heaven."

"An oft-repeated observation," murmured Mr. Fairford, half to himself, "and yet after all, when heart-felt, and truthfully practised, it embodies the wisest philosophy of existence. A young girl like your daughter, Mrs. Torrente," continued he, resuming his thoughtful pacing up and down, "cannot be buried in obscurity. That fresh virginal loveliness; that mind full of brilliant thoughts and beautiful imaginations, to live and die unappreciated. Oh! it should not, it should not be."

Mrs. Torrente's cheek flushed, and her eye grew brighter, and she said gratefully :—

"It gives me the greatest pleasure I have felt for many a long year, to know that a man of your recognised ability appreciates my child. I know," added she, as she rose, "that you will pardon a mother's egotism: as my child is the thing nearest to my heart, it is very natural that it should overflow my lips sometimes."

Mr. Fairford advanced and took her hand with a kind of respectful affection.

"Madame," he said, "in speaking to me with this frankness, you have given me a proof of confidence, of which, though undeserving, I am very proud. If in anything I can be of any use to you, you may freely dispose of me. One favor I would ask—to be allowed to hear your daughter sing."

"That is too easy to be granted to be called a favor. You

have only to come into our little parlor in the course of two or three hours, and your wish shall be gratified."

When Mrs. Torrente reached the basement, she found tea already on the table. Naomi, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, was standing by it absently tapping it with a teaspoon. She took her place, and poured out tea in silence, and then, all at once, meeting her mother's laughing, inquiring gaze, she said enthusiastically, "Oh! mamma, what an intellectual man Mr. Fairford is!"

"Ah ha!" was the triumphant reply, "who said he was uninteresting, and who insisted that he was full of talent and eloquence?"

"It does not seem to me that I ever could have thought it. It is true, I have never associated with gentlemen, but I never could have imagined, that anyone in the world could understand me as he does. Why, he can express what I feel and think better than I can myself; and then he is so full of enthusiasm, that when he talks, his face reminds you of a light shining through an alabaster vase."

Mrs. Torrente regarded the young girl attentively, and something like a faint shadow of anxiety crossed her face. Naomi's cheeks were flushed, her eyes almost unnaturally brilliant, and all her countenance aglow with the joy of awakened intellect. Mrs. Torrente did not know, or if she did she forgot, as do the generality of people who never sufficiently analyse themselves to be able to accurately classify the indications of different feelings, that *love* is never frank and vehement in its manifestations, and that one under its all-absorbing influence instinctively fears that all will read, even in the accents of common praise, the thing of which they are so intensely conscious. She did not recollect this; and for this reason, there was some half-formed anxiety in the inquiring look she turned upon her child as she said:—

"You do not eat, darling; what is the matter?"

Naomi smiled, and pushed away her untouched plate, while her eyes met her mother's fearlessly.

"I am excited, dear mamma—so excited, I feel almost as if my soul would like to leap out of my body. Oh! it is such a happiness to be understood—it is such a pleasure to feel that there is some one in the world who thinks and feels as we do, when we have grown weary of that something within ourselves that separates us from all the rest of the world."

Mrs. Torrente's face settled into a gentle gravity; she looked at her plate and sipped her tea in silence. No more was said till they ascended to the parlor. The room was full of the dreamy haze of a summer twilight, and Naomi, insensibly affected by its tranquillizing influence, seated herself quietly at the piano, and her touch, full of a subdued melancholy, wandered over the keys.

"It seems that Mr. Fairford has left his room," her mother said. "He asked my permission to come and hear you sing, which I, of course, granted."

"Sing for *him*, mamma? I would never dare."

"Nonsense! You must learn to overcome that timidity, and the sooner you commence the better."

About an hour after, a manly step came along the hall, and Mr. Fairford stood in the doorway tapping gently. He entered, and seated himself by Mrs. Torrente in obedience to her polite bidding. There were a few commonplace remarks, and then a pause, and Mrs. Torrente said:—

"Sing something, darling."

After a moment, Naomi's nervous fingers preluded falteringly an air from "Norma," and then her voice, low, wavering, but ever harmonious and expressive, rose tremulous upon the air. There was a profound silence for several minutes after she ceased. Mr. Fairford sat like one absorbed in thought; then, suddenly, he said to Mrs. Torrente, in so low a voice that Naomi could not be sure that she heard rightly.

"Madame, she has a wonderfully beautiful voice."

What her mother answered she did not catch; but the subject by one or the other was abruptly changed, and carried on in a

tone that allowed her to hear distinctly. He did not approach Naomi nor address her during the evening, though he talked brilliantly, eloquently, as he so well knew how; without looking at her, he observed her every movement, and saw with a keen new sense of pleasure, the intervals between the chords she was playing grow longer and longer, until at last her hands lay motionless upon the keys, and her fair head involuntarily, unconsciously turned to him, the better to drink in every word he uttered. Innumerable times he had enjoyed the consciousness of intellectual power, but it might have been his vanity giving it a coloring which in no wise belonged to it, that lent it now such an inexpressible zest.

At ten o'clock, he took his leave, and as he bent deferentially before the young girl, he murmured in so low a voice that it did not reach the mother's ear:—

"We must see about *that*, Miss Naomi, we must see about *that*."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning, Naomi was alone in the parlor, her mother not having yet quitted her room, when Mr. Fairford walked in and took a seat beside her, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, and that instead of his study this were his proper place.

Naomi was very glad to see him, and showed it ingenuously in the animation of her face and manner. They talked. Naomi's ideas flowed into words as spontaneously as the clouds melt into rain—and he, bathing his world-wearied soul in this fresh fountain of youth and bright illusions, seemed to himself to taste again the pure, sweet waters of his own lost youth. Two hours had flown when Mrs. Torrente presented herself, and Mr. Fairford, after chatting a moment, went into his study.

With the difference that every day the pretext of the study was more and more undisguisedly laid aside, matters went on this way for a week; morning and eve found him by Naomi's side, apparently forgetful of all else, and she, with a new joy in her heart, and a new light in her eyes. Meanwhile, Mrs. Torrente, though she had no worldly experience, and possessed consequently little penetration, saw, simply because it was so plain that the blind could have seen it, that the whole affair of the study was a subterfuge to gain admittance to her house; and seeking for an explanation of this mystery, her innocent fancy built up upon the usually solid foundations of such edifices a beautiful little castle in the air, which, divested of its superfluous ornaments, was simply this :—

Mr. Fairford had seen Naomi in the street, and fallen in love with her, and not knowing any one who could present him, had taken this means to make her acquaintance.

He loved her, that was evident; why, then, should he not offer her his hand? Naomi evidently loved him; if not, why manifest such absorbed interest in his society? Thus it was all quite clearly and definitely settled in Mrs. Torrente's mind, and she waited patiently for time to develop what she had so summarily disposed of.

Meanwhile, Naomi, left hour after hour alone with Mr. Fairford, for her mother had severe nervous attacks which confined her almost constantly to her bed, had no other protection than her proud, fearless innocence, armed with which she bravely encountered whatever danger and temptation might have lain in this intimate communion with a man so conversant with all the insidious approaches to an unguarded heart.

Day after day he spoke to her of the stage, of the wild joy of its inspiration, the intoxication of its triumphs, till the force of his glowing words transported her into a world of poetry and passion, where her ardent heart expanded, and she seemed to breathe with a new sense of life.

One day, when he had got her raised to the usual pitch of enthusiasm, he said suddenly:—

"Naomi, what a proud privilege it would be to me to give you a career. What would you say to such a proposition from me?"

She looked at him in wonder.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, I will take you, mamma and all to New York, and establish you there; provide you teachers, wardrobe, engagement, what not: and when you shall be a great singer—coining money, you shall pay it all back to me again."

"Ah! you are jesting."

"Never more in earnest in my life. Do you accept?"

"Why, if you really are in earnest, and if you really think I should not be putting myself under obligations that I never could repay, why you know that I should be too happy—too overpoweringly happy to accept."

"Very well, I go this afternoon to New York—no, not about *that now*—for other business. I shall return on Monday, then we will talk more. Two days—two whole days without seeing *you*."

She looked down. He gently took one of her little hands. Once or twice he had done so before, but there had always been a gentle but steady drawing away, which constrained him to release it. There was the same instinctive shrinking now. With a slight roguish smile, he let the hand slip from his grasp. Then he rose, and stood before her.

"Good-by, Naomi!" he said, holding out his hand.

She gave him hers, and rose. He looked at her for a moment, and then as though moved by an irresistible impulse, clasped both her hands, and bending toward her, silently solicited a kiss. She held him off at arms' length, and said blushing and laughing:—

"No, Mr. Fairford; no, I never kiss gentlemen."

Her air and attitude were very charming—so full of arch coquetry, and yet so childishly innocent.

"Well—well—as you please, naive child. Till Monday, good-by. Think of what I have said. I mean it very, very seriously."

Alone, she fell into a profound reverie, where a thousand vague thoughts blent and lost themselves one within another. There was one person, at least, in the world besides her mother, who cared for her, to whom her life or death was not a matter of entire indifference. A little tranquil home in New York very like this externally, but how changed and brightened to her by the new purpose that had entered her soul—he would come sometimes to see her; without the cheering inspiration of his voice, without his clear, far-sighted counsels, her life would be incomplete.

There was no thought of love in this. The heart that had once been made imperfectly aware of its own existence (she remembered it even in the midst of her dreams with a sup-

pressed sigh), was enamored now of art; and marriage, with its daily recurring cares and vexations, sobering joy to a tame quiet affection, and equalizing life in a placid calm, had but few charms for Naomi's nature, with its ideal needs, its passionate longing thirst for love, and its craving for alternate excitement and calm—less than ever now, when all the enthusiasm of her nature, smouldering for years, had suddenly kindled into a pure flame, and burned brightly on the altar of art.

CHAPTER X.

THE next day Colonel Familiar, who divided his time between New York and Washington, arrived in town, and dropped in upon them very unexpectedly. Mrs. Torrente, who was much better, was able to see him, and, chatting quite confidentially with him as usual, she spoke of Mr. Fairford.

"Know the gentleman very well by reputation," the old Colonel said, "he is a man of talent and eloquence; and the best proof of that is that these qualities won him a rich wife."

"Won him a rich wife! Is he married then?" Mrs. Torrente's face was unfortunately very, very tell-tale, and expressed now all the astonishment, disappointment, and even anger that such an unlooked-for piece of intelligence could not fail to inspire.

"Been married some two or three years. I recollect the circumstance quite well from the fact that, her family being very much opposed to the match, she very quietly walked off one day, and returned home Mrs. Fairford."

Mrs. Torrente's head was in a whirl. With all a mother's trouble for her child in her wistful glance, she turned her eyes on Naomi. The Colonel's quick eye noticed Mrs. Torrente's emotion, and it was a very easy matter for a man of experience to venture a shrewd guess at the cause. Curious to observe the effect upon Naomi, who was rather a puzzle to his worldly, commonplace mind, he leaned his chin upon his hands clasped over the knob of his cane, and looked, with a little laughing malice in his eyes, intently at her.

She was sitting in a low rocking-chair by one of the windows, reading absorbedly. Had she heard anything of the conversation? Surely not. Her heavy eyelashes hid her eyes, but her

face wore the melancholy, intellectual calm that always pervaded it when in repose, that expression that had often induced ordinary observers to call her face passionless. *Passionless!* ay, even as the ocean in repose is passionless.

The Colonel, wishing to do away with the disagreeable effect his words had produced, tried to change the subject; but poor Mrs. Torrente was abstracted and answered at random, and he soon took his leave.

Mrs. Torrente sat in thought for a few minutes, and then said:

"Naomi, darling, come here."

The young girl, still holding her book, drew near.

"Sit down there on the cushion at my feet. I can do without it for a moment. Are you comfortable so?"

"Yes, dear mamma."

At a loss how to begin, the mother stroked Naomi's silky hair in silence for a minute, and then said, almost falteringly:

"Did you hear what the Colonel said, Naomi?"

"About Mr. Fairford? Yes. What of it?"

Often of late years the mother had felt an undefined impression that she did not quite understand her child's nature, and as she contemplated now the young girl's composed face and manner, the thought came back upon her with the force of a conviction. She had been mistaken, then, in her firm belief that Naomi loved Mr. Fairford, that was one great comfort.

"You say that so naturally, child," she resumed, "that I see very plainly that in your innocence you do not understand anything about the matter. But I, who have more experience and some knowledge of men, can explain it to you. Mr. Fairford did not want any study to write in, since he has never written one word in this house. I knew this some days ago, but I supposed him to be unmarried, and that possibly, probably, he might wish to make you his wife, and this, provided it had pleased you equally, would have had my entire approval. But this is not so, cannot be so, since he is a married man. What do you suppose he seeks here then? Why, you cannot guess.

He has seen you in the street, followed you home, learned that you were a friendless orphan girl, with no one to call him to account for anything he might accomplish—and the rest is very plain."

The young girl's eager, listening eyes wore an expression half startled, half incredulous, and round the mouth there wavered an undefinable expression, an approach to a smile, but such a peculiar smile, such a one as a bold hunter might wear as, with his trusty weapon calmly prepared, he watches the charge of a furious beast; a haughty, defiant pleasure in the sense of danger, and a kind of compassionate, yet mocking disdain, were mingled in it. Yet, withal, so faintly marked were these shades of feeling that only a clear, practised, intellectual eye could read them.

She shook her head as her mother finished speaking, and answered:

"No, dear mamma, I cannot think that. I don't believe he ever saw me in the street, or ever came here with any such purpose. You know that he is positively to deliver an address in New York, for he has shown us a paper in which it is announced. What I think is, that he came here to write, as he said, but that he found our society agreeable (for conversation is a great pleasure to the intellectual), and so in that way has failed to follow out what he proposed to himself."

"You are a child; you do not see clearly. It is as plain to me as daylight. When he returns I shall—"

"Dear mother, dear mother, I beg for my sake do not think of such a thing. Why I would not for the world, not for the whole world, that you should speak to him of this. Besides, after all, what does it matter what ideas he may have? It is one thing to have intentions, and quite another to be able to carry them into execution."

The mother heard these words with a kind of astonishment, accompanied as they were by a proud lift of the head, and slight but firm compression of the lips.

There was more in Naomi than she had ever dreamed of. Slowly she said:

"Yes; but there are two things that I do not understand at all. I have every confidence in you, my darling child, but temptation is a very dangerous thing; we should never seek it. Recollect what the Bible says, 'Take heed lest you fall.' In the second place, I don't see why under the circumstances you should wish Mr. Fairford to remain here."

Naomi leaned her cheek upon her mother's knee, and gently clasped her hand.

"Dear mamma, let me tell you what he said to me at our last interview." And she repeated word for word the conversation. "Now do you see that, instead of evil intent, as you imagine, he is friend enough to wish to aid me to realize my darling dream, and acquire fame and fortune. Of course his pecuniary assistance would be but a temporary thing, for I would sooner die than remain under obligations to him, but that would not render it any the less a favor on his part."

"O! Naomi," her mother said, with a distrustful shake of the head, "this only confirms my conviction of the truth of what I have told you. He thinks to win you thus. What better means could he adopt? It would be a fearful risk."

A shade fell suddenly over the young girl's expressive features. She raised her head, and coldly withdrew her hand from her mother's clasp.

"I do not believe it," she said, proudly, "but that does not matter. Since you hold your daughter so lightly as to think that her safety lies not in herself, but in the honor of those about her, why let it go so—say no more about it."

She moved to rise, but Mrs. Torrente, grieved to the heart at having wounded her, caught her in her arms and drew her down upon her knee.

"Dear, darling child," she said, "'tis not that I distrust you. Heaven forbid! 'Tis only a mother's fond, timid heart that

speaks. But come, it shall be as you wish; though you know, Naomi, I cannot like this project of the stage."

Naomi slowly turned her eyes all around the room, and there was a depth of sadness so far passing words in that most eloquent look, that the mother, with her eyes full of tears, murmured in a low voice:

"Poor child! poor child! you are right."

Thus the matter rested for the time.

CHAPTER XI.

NEXT evening Mr. Fairford returned, and finding the street door of Mrs. Torrente's house open, as is customary during the warm weather in Washington, entered unannounced, shook hands very cordially with Mrs. Torrente, who was alone in the parlor, and sat down, chatting in a lively vein about his journey, New York, etc.

Naomi, who was above, heard his voice, and prompted by an impulse the nature of which she did not stop to inquire into, and which she might have found rather difficult to define, loitered much longer than there was even any excuse for doing before descending. Then, entering the parlor with an indifferent air, she uttered a little exclamation of surprise at sight of Mr. Fairford, as if she had been quite unconscious of his arrival. Probably the explanation of this little bit of coquettish insincerity on her part was an unconscious wish to show him that he had not been so much missed in his absence, nor his return so anxiously watched for as his vanity might lead him to suppose.

After a little Mrs. Torrente wearied, and exchanged her armchair for the sofa, where, with cushions shaken up and arranged by Mr. Fairford, she soon sank to sleep. Then Mr. Fairford said:

"Naomi, will you not sit here by the window? See how lovely the night is. Allow me to place your chair—so! let the moonlight shine upon that placid, intellectual brow. Pure, cold, and radiant, 'tis a fit light to illumine you."

"Am I such a cold, heartless being?" she asked laughingly.

"I said wrongly. You are not cold, save by repression."

"How grateful the soft, warm air is," she said, wishing to change the conversation.

"Naomi," he said suddenly, without heeding her remark, "I have a confession to make to you, and pardon to crave. No—there is no need to look away with that startled look, 'tis nothing you might fear to hear. It was a fault, 'tis true, but yet not one committed through any evil intention, but simply from a wish to study human nature under a form so new, fresh, and enticing as was presented to me in you; Naomi, my confession is this: I am a *married man.*"

"I know it." She said it with her eyes full upon him, and there was no surprise, no sorrow, no annoyance in their serene depths. "Was it wrong not to tell us before, think you? What business was it of ours whether you were married or single?"

Through the calm kindness of her tone cut the keen edge of a scarce conscious scorn. She saw in the warm flush of his brow, visible even in the pale moonlight, how deeply she had wounded his vanity. But he was not one to be driven thus to the wall without an effort to defend himself. There was a little of the gall of sarcasm in *his* voice as he answered:

"Some young ladies with less modesty and less judgment than yourself, Miss Naomi, might have imagined that my manner indicated something more than simple friendship, and in this way I should have been guilty of a very grave fault."

"I never did," she said, in a tone as frozen as her face was marbly white in the moonbeams. "I think you like my society and I like yours, *nothing more.*"

With all his self-control and consummate address, he was fain to change the subject. With an attempt at a careless laugh, he said:

"Since it is all just exactly as it should be, let us say no more about it. Let us speak of something more interesting to you, and consequently more agreeable to me—of your profession, Naomi."

The set lines of her mouth relaxed very, very slightly, and there was one degree less of coldness in her eyes; yet the face did not smile with its accustomed warmth when animated by conversation. He went on:

"I have been dreaming of the night of your debut—of the welcome the public will accord to the young cantatrice. What will be your emotions, Naomi, when the proud day comes (for come it surely must) in which you shall hold a breathless audience in the palm of your hand, and receive the intoxicating incense of applause that shall crown the triumph of your genius."

She wavered. She could not help it. Melting suddenly into her usual self—half child, half woman—she said, with downcast eyes:

"You flatter me, Mr. Fairford; yet, I must confess, so well do you understand the art of flattery that it is agreeable even though I know it to be such."

"Do you believe it to be flattery? Do you not hope, or rather, do you not believe that you will rise to the first rank in your profession?"

"I do assuredly, otherwise I should certainly not wish to adopt it."

"Well, then, do not call my simple expression of opinion *flattery*. As soon as I have transacted some business I have on hand here, we will see about our project, for it depends in a great degree on the success of this business. There are obstacles to be overcome, but I trust they are not insurmountable."

A chill of unconscious and unacknowledged distrust and suspicion contracted Naomi's heart as she heard these ambiguous expressions. He saw, and hastened to efface the impression.

"The career of an artiste, Naomi, is one of trial, as well as of pleasure. There are temptations, annoyances, and a great deal of *hard work*. Do you think you will be willing to drudge for a while?"

Thoughtfully she turned her face towards the street, and resting her elbows on the sill of the window, gazed up at the stars.

"I will tell you how I feel about it," she said. "I want an aim, an object in existence. Matrimony has always seemed to me rather a dull and stupid affair. I mean I think it would be so to me, and my present solitary, monotonous life is more than wearisome—it is sometimes burdensome. I am willing to drudge, then, as you call it, and willing to encounter temptations and annoyances. They will be something to combat and something to overcome."

"It is strange to hear a young girl speak thus *sincerely*, as I know you do, of matrimony; which is generally the thing they most dream of and most long for. Why is it?"

"For one thing, I love my freedom. For another, I long for independence—pecuniary independence—more than anything else in this world, and married I could never have that."

"Fierce young eaglet! you would make your eyrie on the top of an inaccessible mountain, where no bold hunter may ever reach to catch and cage you. Will you not weary of your wild solitude, so far removed from human sympathy?"

"He who wearies of liberty deserves to be a slave. Do not believe that *I* ever shall in this way merit to forfeit mine."

"Love, I perceive, has no part in the programme of your life. Is the great ruling power of the universe to be utterly ignored, and for ever banished?"

"All dedicating themselves to art and fame should render themselves up to that, and that *alone*. The love and enthusiasm of an artistic life should satisfy the heart."

"And you believe this theory practicable?"

"I do."

"O! what a child you are! Well, well, we shall see how bravely you carry out your projects. If you succeed you will have the triumph of being unprecedented; and if you fail, the

consolation of knowing that you have only done what everyone else does. You have rare abilities, Naomi."

"Flattering again. See! mamma stirs restlessly. It is time for me to take her to bed. I will wake her."

"Let me say good-night first. At least I may press a kiss on this little hand? No? Ah! that is too hard. We kiss the Queen's hand, you know, so I will do you homage in spite of yourself. You are regal in your tastes, and love it, I know. Good night."

She laughed and blushed a little, as with these gay words he snatched a kiss from her hand and disappeared, and remained for some minutes standing where he left her, lost in a sweet castle-building reverie, till rousing herself, she went with her sweet face lit up with the glow of hope in the future to wake her mother.

CHAPTER XII.

THE lingering remains of Mrs. Torrente's incredulity yielded entirely when some days after Mr. Fairford took occasion to speak to her *alone* of his enthusiastic desire to aid Naomi, of his hopes in her genius, and his admiration for the innocence and purity of her character.

So the path was all clear, and he had only to wait, he thought, and let the fruit of the desired and forbidden tree ripen beneath the influences he would bring to bear, and then, with his aspiring hand, grasp it almost without an effort.

"I love her," mused he often on his way to and from her home. "She is irresistibly attractive to me; yet were I free would I woo her for my wife? Would I wed one who has neither wealth nor position to advance my interest? I suppose I should strive even then to win her on my own terms. I should like to subdue her pride and rule her will. It can and shall be done. I am not accustomed to be foiled."

Ah! good Mr. Presumption, you were not accustomed to be foiled? Neither were you accustomed to attack one as proud and strong as yourself; one guided by a firm innate principle of right, more potent than all your knowledge and skill.

Mrs. Torrente was ill again for several days, and then how Naomi learned to prize Mr. Fairford, to look for him, almost to lean on him, as though indeed he had been something to her! She was too proud to be grateful for any favor, unless rendered in a particularly delicate way; coming without this requisite she would have felt it almost as an insult. Mr. Fairford was essentially a gentleman, and consequently full of delicacy; and this quality was heightened in him by his instinctive perception

of Naomi's character. He brought wines, and fruits, and every little delicacy of the season for the invalid; would leave them quietly on some side-table; and when noticed by Naomi, would say, as though begging some special favor for himself:

"I know you cannot have time to attend to these little things. I hope your mother will not be displeased, and that you will permit me the privilege of ministering to her comfort by bringing her those trifles?"

The first time this happened Naomi turned away to hide the moisture of her eyes (poor child! it was something so new to her), and after a moment held her hand out, saying earnestly:

"You are a dear, good friend. I need not tell you how I appreciate your consideration."

One afternoon, while he was sitting with her, a servant brought a basket wrapped in tissue paper; and when, during a pause in the conversation, she ran up-stairs to see how her mother was, she took it with her. The first thing that met her eye on unwrapping it was a lovely little fancy basket, and lying right on top of it a bunch (not a bouquet) of rare and beautiful flowers. She raised it with an involuntary exclamation of delight, and as she did so a little ruby heart, a heart of flame indeed, attached to a gold black-enamelled chain, fell from it. She caught it up, and obeying her first impulse, turned towards the bed and held it before her mother. At first the invalid saw only the flowers.

"O! they are beautiful, darling," she said.

"And this, mamma?"

"Let me see! a little jewel heart. It is intended for you, of course. What do you think of it, dear?"

"I cannot accept it, mamma. I will take it down now and say so."

"You are right. Kiss me, my precious child!"

Naomi descended the stairs very slowly, hesitated at the parlor door, but at length summoning courage, she entered, the chain dangling from her hand.

"Mr. Fairford," she said, "I thank you very much indeed for these sweet flowers; but this," laying the gem gently in the palm of one of his hands, "you must keep for some one who has the right to accept it."

"And you then have not the right to accept it from me as a memento of friendship?"

"It is a costly trinket. It is not well, it is not—I am sorry, but I cannot take it."

"Pardon me, Naomi, but you really have very exaggerated notions about some things. You cannot accept a little trinket not much bigger than a pea from a friend; how, then, can you reconcile yourself to allowing this same person to aid you in your views in regard to your profession?"

This was not like Mr. Fairford, but for once pique got the better of judgment and good taste.

Naomi's face flushed slightly. "There is just this difference," she said steadily. "The one is a *gift*, the other a *loan*. Any one may with propriety accept the latter; only those *privileged* to do so can accept the first."

"Not even a friend's offering? Ah! you are too sensible for that. Let me clasp it round your neck. See, the brightly flashing little thing speaks only of the steadiness and sincerity of my friendship."

She wavered a little. "I will ask mamma," she said, hesitatingly.

"All safe!" thought Mr. Fairford, "*mamma* will think whatever *she* does."

The point gained, he adroitly changed the conversation, feasting his eyes meanwhile on Naomi's animated face and beautiful form. She was dressed simply in white, and her dark hair was braided into a knot low upon her neck. The shades of evening were slowly gathering, and from the surrounding obscurity her figure stood out as glowingly as from the heavy shadows of its background beams on you one of Rembrandt's pictures. As he gazed on her, almost involuntarily the words came from his lips:

"Naomi, I love you."

She started violently, and a flush of vivid crimson mantled all her face. It was the first time that these words in this sense had ever been addressed to her. Her eyes were bowed to earth by a sense of shame unknown before. Very gravely she said:

"You have no right to love me—you do not, must not."

"Do not degrade your lips with the conventional hypocrisy of the world," he said warmly. "You have too much profundity of intellect to respect the shallow cant that says we have no *right* to love under certain circumstances. We *have* a right to love whatever is lovable, just as we have a right to admire whatever is admirable. Say that, bound by ties which cannot be ignored, I have no right *to tell you so*, and you will say truly. It was wrong. I beg your pardon. But before I leave for ever the subject I have thus for the first time touched upon, tell me one thing, Naomi. If I were free, would you tell me then I had no right to love you?"

She did not answer. She did not want to answer. Was there a lurking thought that under other circumstances it might not have displeased her to hear such words from his lips? Or was it a coquettish wish to leave him in ignorance on this point?

Or only a distaste to wounding him unnecessarily? It might have been any one of these; it might have been a mixture of all. She did not know definitely herself, and after a few moments' silence, shaking off the weight that oppressed her, she said abruptly, with a mischievous laugh:

"Come, Mr. Fairford, let us talk no more nonsense, for nonsense it is, and I don't believe a word of it."

He laughed too, and gaily sought to clasp her little hands, which she, still laughing, wrested from him, and then suddenly sobering, changed the subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

If he derived any encouragement from this conversation, it was dissipated by her subsequent demeanor, which, though running through a thousand shades of variety, sometimes melancholy, sometimes gay, sometimes full of frank friendship, and at others redolent of coquetry, was always innocently unconscious, and always characterized by a proud, chaste fearlessness.

It was necessary for him to return home. Probably he consoled himself with the reflection that with more time and better opportunities he might be able to accomplish what, under present circumstances, was impossible.

Incongruous as it may seem, spite of his galled self-love, and apart from all base and selfish ends, there was at the bottom of his heart a feeling of deep and true tenderness for Naomi.

He thought, as he went towards her home for the last time, of all the beauty she had lent his life for the past few weeks; and of the great void that this, in all probability his eternal separation from her, would leave within him.

His heart, that heart so taken up with the world's vain strife for place and power, yearned towards her with something of its original purity and strength.

He said to himself that if he only might, with what a sense of rest, with what a feeling of satisfaction he would have gathered her to his bosom, lifted her in his strong arms, and walked onward with her.

As he neared the house, strangely saddened by these reflections, he saw the object of his thoughts standing at one of the open windows of her little parlor. She leaned out to greet him, her face all smiles.

"O! come in! come in!" she cried, joyously; "mamma is a great deal better to-day;" and running towards him with the vivacity of a child as he entered, she grasped his hands and drew him to the window.

"Only see this lovely, lovely morning," she said. "Everything is covered with a soft, golden mist, and the air has that balmy softness peculiar to the Indian summer."

His glance, with a touch of sadness in it quite unusual in his animated blue eyes, dwelt thoughtfully upon her, and gently passing his hand over her silken hair, as though in truth she had been his child, he said:

"The Indian summer! *You* are *my* Indian summer, Naomi. As fresh, and soft, and bright; as dreamy and joyous, and yet with that indefinable something of sweet, tender melancholy breathing through all. Yes, Naomi, you are the Indian summer of my life, the last golden smile of my departing youth. Hereafter all that you personify will have died out for me."

His tone was mournful. She looked at him with a kind of half-laughing, half-serious wonder in her eyes, and said:

"You are poetical this morning, and something more; something that I have never seen you before—almost sad. Is there any reason for it?"

"The reason is that, for a little while at least" (he said this with an effort, for the better part of his nature shrank now from deceit) "I am to be deprived of your cheering presence; I am going home this afternoon."

The joyous face before him was grave and thoughtful in an instant.

"Going so soon? O! I am very sorry. When ——" She checked herself suddenly. Delicacy forbade her to ask questions. He was at liberty to say *unasked* all that she could wish to know; if he did not choose to speak *voluntarily*, why she must remain in ignorance. She never, unless under the influence of strong excitement, could be said to have color, but the almost imperceptible tinge of pink usually upon her cheek was

quite gone now. He, too, was pale, his manner strangely nervous, and his restless eyes sought the ground to avoid encountering hers.

"I am glad to know," he said, speaking almost hurriedly, "that I leave your dear mother better. I don't want to trouble her to come down; let me go up and say good-bye. You can remain here—there can be no impropriety, then, surely? may I?" She bowed assent, and with a quick step he hastened above stairs and tapped gently at Mrs. Torrente's door. Her voice said "come in," and he entered. She rose from her arm-chair at sight of him, and said, cordially holding out both her hands:

"Why, Mr. Fairford. This is a surprise; I am very glad to see you."

"Glad to bid me God speed," he said with a forced laugh. "I go home this afternoon."

"It will not be for long," she said, with a cheerful smile, "will it? We shall very soon meet again?"

Her words, so full of fervent trust in him, smote him, and he almost shrank—but he must keep it up to the end.

"Yes, Mrs. Torrente, I shall, of course, write very soon. I owe you many thanks. O! believe me, the brightest, happiest days that I have seen for many a year I have passed beneath your roof. Good-bye! good-bye until we meet again."

He shook her hand warmly, then turned away, and rapidly descending the stairs, re-entered the parlor. Naomi still stood where he had left her, with drooping head and fixed eyes, lost in melancholy thought. He drew near, holding out his hand:

"Good-bye, Naomi, my last illusion, my last—last glimpse of the heavenly promised land. Good-bye! one kiss, Naomi, but one! a brother's parting kiss."

She did not smile, she did not resist, but like a statue suffered him to press one kiss upon her lips. He could not bring himself to utter one more deceitful word; his heart had

grown too large for the debasing aims that it had nourished. He held her hand in his a moment longer, and then, ashamed of a weakness he could not master, released it, and passed rapidly from the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT need to say no letter ever came from Mr. Fairford! The bright episode that had aroused Naomi's intellect and awakened her ambition, casting over the future that lay so barrenly before her the radiant glow of promise, was at an end—no more dreams as glorious as youth, as infinite as life seems to the young. No; if she dreamed now it must be of shadowy, impalpable forms, not the glowing, breathing creations that the magic of his eloquent words called up.

As days rolled into weeks, and weeks into months, bringing gradually the conviction that all had been mere vain, empty words, without the shadow of a purpose, it was Mrs. Torrente who in her undeception suffered the most cruel disappointment; for she it had been who, her incredulity once vanquished, had trusted most implicitly; while, unacknowledged even to herself, Naomi had a kind of intuitive doubt which in some degree prepared her for the result.

It was very natural that with a person of Mrs. Torrente's character resentment for an intended wrong should take the place of friendship.

Not so Naomi. Thus would she answer her mother's harsh denunciations of Mr. Fairford:

"If that were really his purpose, dear mother, be satisfied that he did not accomplish it. He never harmed me; on the contrary, he has done me more good than any one, except yourself, in the world."

"In what way, I should like to know?"

"He has developed my mind and character—shown me to myself. His friendship has been an event in my life."

Mrs. Torrente was thus at last softened, though she never entirely forgave Mr. Fairford the treacherous part he had played.

In the old way passed the winter and spring, and summer found them as the first chapter has described.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next evening about the same hour Mrs. Torrente was in the parlor, rather nervously awaiting the Colonel's appearance. Naomi descended a few minutes after her mother, and singularly enough, instead of entering the parlor as usual, strayed out into the little garden. The house, standing on the highest rise of the White House hill, was but little passed. She had been watching the windings of the Potomac and the shifting clouds for some time, when, happening to turn her head, she saw the Colonel and a stranger approaching. She drew back quickly and allowed them to enter, and the Colonel saying in his brief, military way: "Mr. Mayance, Miss Torrente," led the way into the house. Mr. Mayance, with a profound bow to the young girl, followed her in silence, and sat down by her side after being presented to Mrs. Torrente.

"You were admiring the beauties of the summer sunset, Miss Torrente?" he said.

"I scarcely know what I was doing; dreaming, I believe as much as anything."

"I have noticed that it is the custom here in Washington for young ladies to walk near their homes at sunset, with bare heads and linked arms. It is a very pretty custom, I think, but one which struck me at first as very strange."

"You do not belong to Washington, then?"

"O! no. I am from great, whirling, Babel-like New York."

During the interchange of these few words Naomi had been unconsciously taking note of Mr. Mayance's appearance. She had seen at the first glance that his figure was remarkably fine, and his bearing very elegant. She observed now that his features, though not regular, were well formed, his dark brown

eyes liquid and expressive, his hair of a soft brown, and his complexion almost as delicately tinged as a woman's.

He wore a moustache, and a beard of a graceful length. His conversation was intelligent and his manner perfectly well-bred, and Naomi in conversing with him found herself entirely at ease.

She played and sang for him, and they chatted pleasantly for nearly an hour, when he and the Colonel took their leave. Mrs. Torrente was delighted with Mr. Mayance. Turning to Naomi with a beaming smile, she said, "I don't know when I have seen a gentleman so handsome—so well-bred, intelligent, and amiable. Don't you think so, child?"

Naomi had just closed the piano, and stood with one hand resting on it, with her far-off look in her eyes. She glanced quickly round at her mother's question and answered slowly:

"Yes, very, very—as you say, dear mamma."

The mother was not very penetrating, but this answer was so very unsatisfactory that an expression of deep disappointment crossed her face, and she said no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOWARDS noon the next day Mr. Gaspar Mayance was sitting in his room in the house of a relative, situated in Twelfth street, near the Avenue, chatting with Colonel Familiar, who had sauntered round to see his friend after breakfast, mainly with the object of ascertaining how he had been impressed by Naomi. Reclining in their cozy arm-chairs by the open window, enjoying the fresh morning air and their cigars, they had been speaking about everything except what was at the moment of most interest to the Colonel, who feared, shrewd old fox! that by making a dash at it he should put Mr. Mayance on his guard before the bonds of love were sufficiently strong to hold him. Mr. Mayance, on his part, was dying to speak of Naomi, but a timidity inherent in his character withheld him, until at last, breaking through it with an effort, he said:

"I am indebted to you, Colonel, for the presentation of last night. Miss Torrente is very charming—so intelligent—and what a beautiful figure she has."

"And face, too. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, noble and intelligent, and beautiful taken in connection with her figure. She has just that kind of intelligence one admires in a woman; just the quickness and brightness, without that power and originality of mind which make a woman dangerous in domestic relations—dangerous I mean in this way, she would be apt to want to govern her husband."

The Colonel, with a whiff of his cigar, nodded his head approvingly. These were exactly his own views, and he was pleased, too, to see that his friend's thoughts seemed to be turning to matrimony. He said nothing on *this* point, however, and Mr. Mayance went on—

"There's Clara Sordam, my fortieth cousin, whom you have seen here, I believe; really a beautiful girl, highly intellectual and well educated, but precisely on account of having more strength of mind than women generally have, very unfit, I should say, to make any man happy. Mrs. Torrente very kindly invited me to visit them frequently, and I shall be much pleased to do so."

The Colonel applauded this resolution, and gave Mr. Mayance a slight sketch of Naomi's father, the circumstances of her mother's marriage, and after a while left, feeling well assured that things would work themselves out without any interference from him.

Mr. Mayance would have liked much to see Naomi that afternoon; but not deeming it advisable to commence by showing too strong an interest, he restrained the desire; calmed his impatience by methodically answering some business letters; and spent the evening at home in a pleasant circle, among whom was the gay and handsome cousin he had spoken of to the Colonel.

At Mrs. Torrente's time had relapsed now into its old, monotonous pace, and the hours lagged away unendurably slow as they passed, yet seeming to have flown when looked back upon; for when reviewed they presented only the unruffled, unvarying calm of a dead, stagnant pool.

In the morning of the long summer days, some slight domestic responsibility devolved upon Naomi, which lightened the hours of their weariness. She rose early enough to see that breakfast was served at eight, in the little back parlor (associated with the brightest hours of her life), and then, when her mother's health permitted, they breakfasted together; and when it did not, Naomi with her own hands carefully prepared breakfast and bore it to her mother's bedside, afterwards sitting down herself to her silent, solitary meal. Transmitting her mother's orders to their servant, and attending personally to numberless little domestic affairs, took up her attention till after dinner; but then—O! then, when Mrs. Torrente lay down for her

invariable afternoon siesta, after she had shaded the blinds of the bedroom and smoothed her mother's pillow, and tenderly kissed her forehead, and left her to the slumber she prayed might bring her renewed strength, then Naomi, poor lonely child, began to suffer. There was no need of being dull, would she say to herself, not the least in the world; there was her piano, she would practise; but alas! there was no ear to listen, no voice to criticise or encourage. Well, were there not quantities of books in the back parlor? surely *there* was a resource. Yes, truly, there was for a time, but to read day after day, without any one to call your attention to beauties unperceived before, without any one to laugh, or weep, or appreciate with you, will it not at last weary? There was still the last resort—to write. To write? But it was ever the same, practising, reading, writing, always, always herself, and herself alone, with her dearth of reminiscences, enlivened only by one treasured flower; her ignorance of life beyond the cold shadow of her own cloistering door, and her vain day-dreams that mocked her now with their impracticability. Driven back perpetually upon herself, her tireless imagination and ardent heart, consecrated to nothing, adequately filled by nothing, devoured themselves and overwhelmed her. O, in those many silent, solitary hours, unsympathized with, since there was no one to whom she could confide what she felt, the sense of existence bore upon her with an aching weight of dull agony. Yet when, just at nightfall, Mrs. Torrente came into the parlor, looking refreshed by her quiet sleep, she always found her child with a serene brow; ready with her tender kiss and offered arm, no trace of the pain she felt upon her face, save in the inexpressible melancholy of the deep, dark eyes.

It was on the second day after Mr. Mayance had been presented at their house that Naomi, feeling much in one of those moods, was alone in the parlor, about four o'clock in the afternoon. Seated before a little table on which rested the book she had been trying to read, her hands were crossed on it, and her head bowed on them, when a sudden ring of the street-door bell

startled her. She sat up quickly, adjusted her slightly disarranged hair, just in time to seem to be composedly reading, when the parlor door opened, and the servant ushered in Mr. Mayance. At sight of his cheerful, handsome face, the air seemed to Naomi to lighten and a weight to lift from her oppressed heart. She rose and gave him her hand, and welcomed him with a face into which light and color had suddenly flashed. Mr. Mayance, who of course could not divine the secret of her joy, and never could for a moment have imagined that she would have been equally well pleased to see any other person possessing in the same degree the characteristics of a gentleman, was inexpressibly flattered and elated by her cordial reception.

He exerted himself to entertain her, and his conversation, though not highly intellectual, was sufficiently interesting, indicating an intelligent and an extremely well informed mind. Naomi could not be her truer, innermost self to him, but she felt this now rather a relief than otherwise. She longed for the moment to be matter-of-fact, commonplace even—anything that she was not. The absence in his nature of everything like poetic inspiration, or the inclination to metaphysical self-pondering, seemed to renew the every-day, cheerful, plodding life which was, the little she had of it, wearing out of her in her strange, isolated existence.

When he rose to go, a sentiment of girlish delicacy prevented her from inviting him to repeat his visit, but her eyes looked the invitation more eloquently than her lips could have expressed it, and it was accepted with as much joy as if it had been framed in words.

He thought as he walked pensively away from her house how pretty and intelligent—in one word, how interesting she was to him in every way. Above all, what a cheerful and happy temper she possessed, and how well calculated she was, from her modest, retiring nature, to make an attached and devoted wife, especially to one like himself, who so loved a secluded and tran-

quil life. Then it was that his intention of winning Naomi for a wife if possible (and he did not doubt this), though it had existed unacknowledged from the first, assumed a definite form.

She watched him from the window as he walked away, admiring his fine, manly form and graceful gait, feeling so much happier that she almost wondered where all her dark, miserable thoughts and feelings had gone. She so hoped he would come often while he remained in Washington. Would he? Did he feel sufficient interest in her to frequently take a long walk to visit that little lonely house, so noiselessly cold and full of shadows?

Thus pondering she stood for a long time, her eyes fixed on the distant, misty hills.

CHAPTER XVII.

NAOMI did not have to ponder long the question whether Mr. Mayance would visit them or not; for every evening immediately after nightfall she would hear the little garden gate open, and a step she soon learned to recognise come along the gravel walk, ascend the steps of the low porch, and die away in the carpeted hall. Then, a moment after Mr. Mayance would stand low-bowing in the parlor door, bearing in his hand almost invariably a bouquet or a little basket of flowers for Naomi.

Spite of these significant little attentions, the young girl was very far from suspecting that Mr. Mayance had for her any other feeling than friendship. In fact, she never thought about it at all; and had he possessed a knowledge of the human heart, the perfect unreserve of her manner, her calm, full, steady gaze, and the frank, cordial way in which she greeted him, would have shown him at once what was the nature of her feelings for him.

Poor Mrs. Torrente had never been more happy. Her vivid imagination had again run away with her, though this time certainly not without some foundation in fact. She and the Colonel held long diplomatic councils in which they discussed the best way of bringing things to a successful termination. Mrs. Torrente was a little fearful of venturing an opinion as to the state of Naomi's affections, having been so much deceived in the case of Mr. Fairford; but the Colonel unqualifiedly declared that he knew as well as he could know anything that Mr. Mayance's feelings for Naomi were fully reciprocated. Things, he said, would not go on much longer in this way. There would be a declaration from the gentleman, and he advised Mrs. Torrente to sound Naomi on the subject.

It was one night on going to bed that the mother rather nervously acted on this suggestion. She herself was already in bed, and Naomi half undressed, looking like a "summer moon half dipped in cloud," stood leaning on the foot-board.

"Naomi, dear," the mother said, attentively observing the young girl's face in obedience to the Colonel's advice, "what do you think of our friend?"

Naomi opened her large eyes, with a slight expression of wonder in her ingenuous face, and answered:

"How, mamma? Why?"

"How? Why, what do *you* think of *him* personally? and what do you think of him as regards ourselves?"

"O! I think he is very gentlemanly and extremely kind and amiable, and I think he has a true, warm friendship for us, for which I am very glad, it is so pleasant to have friends."

Look as intently as she might, Mrs. Torrente could detect not the least trembling in the eyelid, not the faintest variation in the color of the young girl's cheek; her tone and manner were as frank, cheerful, and natural as possible.

Mrs. Torrente sat up in bed and motioned Naomi to her side.

"Sit down here, dear. Now listen to me attentively. You know I have never treated you with the usual authority of a parent. You have always been to me more like a friend and companion. You have a great deal of sense, a great deal of judgment; but still, like all young girls, you are a little wayward about some things. Now then, listen. Mr. Mayance loves you, and I am sure he intends asking you to be his wife; and when he speaks first to you about the matter, you must be very careful how you act. He is not a bold, presuming man like Mr. Fairford, and needs to be encouraged. I tell you this so that you may not get frightened and run away, as girls are apt to do; because at first you never know your own minds, and do not understand the nature of your own feelings. I do not believe there is any one in the world, Naomi, to whom I would so joyfully see you married as to Mr. Mayance. He has

an excellent position as a lawyer, a fair income, and, besides all his admirable qualities, he is of an age to make a devoted husband. I have been so relieved lately, seeing your future so securely and happily provided for. O! it is such a consolation to me, for I know you will be happy; for if you are happy now in his society, how much more so will you be when he can devote all his time and attention to you."

Through all this long harangue Naomi sat in stupified silence, gazing steadily at her mother, who had watched her child paling and felt her hands growing cold as ice within her own. She waited to be quite sure that the speech was indeed terminated, and then she spoke slowly, with an undertone of deepest melancholy in her grave voice:

"I do not want to marry, mamma; you know I do not want to marry."

"It is nonsense, perfect nonsense, Naomi, to talk that way; nothing but a child's foolish whim, when you know how *indispensable* it is for you *to marry*, and have an excellent opportunity of doing so. Now go to bed, and unless you wish to seriously offend me, be more reasonable."

With a movement of irritation rare in her she turned her back upon the young girl, and composed herself to sleep.

Mechanically Naomi finished undressing, arranged her hair for the night, then laid herself down in the little cot opposite to her mother's bed. But to sleep was utterly impossible with the inward emotion that agitated her. She sat up and, convinced that her mother slept soundly, bowed her head upon her hands, and surrendered herself to her reflections.

How was this? Mr. Mayance, who had whiled away so many weary hours for her, whom she had regarded with such kindly, such almost affectionate feelings, was it possible that in one moment he had become an object of repugnance and dread to her? What was this within her that so revolted, not with the feelings of loathing she had for her first suitor, but with such utter disinclination and dissatisfaction at the bare thought of

love relations with him? But was her mother right? Did he love her? What kind of love was this that could so tamely bear the bonds of restraint for weeks, and never for one single instant break away? She understood his character perfectly, and though it was not congenial with her own, yet she had ever liked him as he was; but he did not, she knew it—felt it—comprehend her true character in the least. How, then, could he love her? She pondered thus with a strange feeling of bondage on her which she strove to shake off. She was free. She could and she would, too, put an end to everything at the first definite sign of its existence. With this determination broadly and strongly defined she lay down, tranquillized herself with an effort, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DURING the next day no reference was made by either mother or daughter to the conversation of the preceding night. Mrs. Torrente took it for granted that Naomi had only talked as young girls do, and had thought better of her folly.

Half an hour before sunset, rather earlier than usual, Mr. Mayance came. He found Mrs. Torrente alone in the parlor, and sat in silence for several moments, seemingly preoccupied and somewhat disturbed. At last he said: "Mrs. Torrente, would you object to your daughter taking a walk with me this evening?"

"Not in the least," responded Mrs. Torrente, animatedly. "I think she will be much pleased to do so. There she is."

Naomi entered. She wore a dress of blue and brown barège, and the rather sombre colors added to the air of cold gravity that seemed to surround her like a new atmosphere. She bowed, and drawing near the little white marble centre-table, stood folding and unfolding a piece of blank paper. Unconsciously to herself her manner and the expression of her face were so repellant that Mr. Mayance, somewhat timid and more than usually sensitive, hesitated for some minutes to name the proposed walk; but finally recollecting that Miss Torrente would not know how to understand his silence, he spoke with an effort:

"Miss Naomi, it is a lovely evening. It will be daylight for half an hour yet, and after that there will be a beautiful moon. Will you do me the honor to accept my escort for a short walk?"

Aided by her mother's suggestions of the night previous, it was easy for Naomi to divine the object he had in view

in this proposition. Again that feeling of repugnance and dread went over her like a chill. She answered in a constrained and measured voice:

"I am not feeling well to-day, Mr. Mayance, and am not equal to the exertion of a walk."

In vain Mrs. Torrente looked reproach, expostulation, entreaty, Naomi's eyes obstinately refused to meet hers. Irritated out of her usual prudence and calmness, she said almost sharply:

"A walk will do you good. I wish you to go. Why should you refuse?"

Rarely, very rarely was Naomi ever disrespectful to her mother.

To her deep filial reverence was added the highest respect for the truth, purity, and goodness of her mother's nature, and a deep, abiding tenderness rooted in her very being. But when touched on *particular points*, then, and *only then*, Naomi was passionate and violent. Unfortunately, with her unguarded remark the mother had wounded her where she was most sensitive. She looked up for a moment, a bright spot of red burning on either cheek, and replied almost haughtily:

"I do not go, because *I do not wish*."

Mr. Mayance sat for a moment quite pale with suppressed feeling; then he rose, took his hat, and approaching Mrs. Torrente, said:

"You have treated me, madame, with unvarying kindness and generous hospitality; accept my thanks, and allow me to say good-bye." Then, turning away, he bowed profoundly to Naomi, and quitted the room and the house.

When the last echo of his footsteps had died away, Mrs. Torrente bowed her face in her hands, and wept with deep, quiet sorrow. The evil feeling was still upon Naomi, and she resisted as long as possible the influence that drew her to her mother's side; but it conquered at last. She approached and knelt beside her.

"Dear mother, forgive me for speaking so rudely to you! I am very sorry. Will you forgive me?"

"O!" the mother said through her sobs, "poor wayward child, that will persist in refusing protection and happiness, so that some day, perhaps ere long, she will be left homeless, shelterless, friendless—alone, my God! in this desolate world."

"At least then do not cast me out from the shelter of your love while yet it is mine!" murmured the tender voice at her feet; and quite unable to resist this appeal, she opened her arms, and the lovely drooping head was pillowed on its surest, safest rest—a mother's loving, unselfish heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

For two or three days Naomi only thought of Mr. Mayance with a sense of relief and release; but gradually, against her will, she began to miss him. In the evening she often found herself looking at his accustomed seat, and unconsciously wondering why she did not hear the accustomed step upon the gravel walk. Sitting by the open window, the room lighted often only by the moonbeams, her mother in her arm-chair or on her couch, she would fancy him standing beside her, her hand in his, perchance his arm about her, fancy herself his—yes, really his wife; and it seemed to her that something of the first intensity of her feeling of repugnance had worn away. Then some trifling thing, some little movement of her own, some passing breeze fanning her cheek in exactly the same way as it had done at that time, recalled with that mysterious power of association the Fairford episode, bringing back for one moment the glorious light that had flooded life for a few brief days; and then, from out the shadow of the past, receding further and further every day, would come the memory of what might have been, had her first abortive bud of love ripened in the sunlight of reciprocity. With a sigh would she bid these memories float once more into darkness, and her imagination, plunging into the future, craved with the fervent impatience of youth a completed life—something that in looking back upon it might enable her to say, "at least I have lived."

But these were dreams invoked by night and solitude; day brought her back to realities. Every hour increased her feeling of regret for the loss of Mr. Mayance. O! she did so wish things might have continued as they were interminably.

About ten days had passed when the Colonel, whom they had not seen since the evening of Mr. Mayance's last visit, entered quite unexpectedly. He looked worried and vexed, and had to impose upon himself a great deal of self-restraint to control his natural brusqueness enough to say to Naomi in rather a surly way: "Good evening, child."

"What is the news, Colonel?" asked Mrs. Torrente.

"O! well, nothing particular. Mr. Mayance is going home to-morrow."

Mrs. Torrente looked pained but resigned, and said nothing. The Colonel glanced out of the corner of his eye at Naomi. She was sitting quietly underneath the candelabra, and he could plainly see the disturbed, undecided, wistful expression of her face. Pretending to be entirely unobservant of her, he turned and commenced chatting with Mrs. Torrente. After a moment Naomi rose, went to the little table where her writing-desk stood, opened it, sat down and wrote steadily for a few minutes. Then she folded, sealed, and directed her note, and walked over to the Colonel with that same steady air, though her cheeks were slightly flushed and the hand that held the letter trembled little.

"Colonel, will you please to hand this to Mr. Mayance, if it be not too much trouble?"

Mrs. Torrente's heart was in her throat, and the Colonel afterwards declared that he could have turned a somerset for joy; yet both had diplomacy enough (Mrs. Torrente owed it to the quiet but tremendous pressure of the Colonel's boot upon her left foot) to retain their gravity, and express neither surprise nor pleasure at this entirely unexpected occurrence.

Spite of himself, however, he was in great haste to be gone, and his face as he said good night expanded into a broad grin. His "Good night, child," was as hearty and cordial as his first salutation had been cold and forced.

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Mayance was alone in his room, completing his preparations for the journey of the following day. Turning over one of his drawers, he came suddenly on one of Naomi's little gloves, which he had found one day and taken possession of. He thought that he had mastered all feeling for her, yet the sight of this gave him a pang. He stood with it in his hand for a long time, observing with admiration how exactly it had taken the form of her pretty little hand. It was very natural to pass from the thought of the hand to the arm, from the arm to the neck, and then the face smiled—the figure breathed before him. He was not much given to analyse other people's feelings or his own, thus he had never exactly understood the real nature of his sentiments for Naomi, or to what extent his heart was interested. Certainly her beauty had inspired him with a passion, and, besides this, up to the evening of their last interview, he had always admired what he conceived to be her character. Perhaps the kind of placidity in his nature opposed and prevented any great depth of feeling; at any rate, a few days had apparently sufficed to reconcile him to the existing state of affairs.

There was a subdued tap at his door, and in obedience to his "come in," the door opened and the Colonel entered. His face, in the effort to preserve its gravity, was far graver than usual, but there was a merry twinkle in the eye, and the corners of the mouth would arch a little.

"Good evening, Colonel. Take a seat. I am busy, you see. You will excuse my going on with my packing?"

"Of course. Saw Mrs. Torrente this evening. Sent her kindest regards and best wishes."

Mr. Mayance bowed, and turning round to his trunk, the Colonel availed himself of the opportunity to place Naomi's note upon the bureau, and when Mr. Mayance again approached it, it was the first thing that caught his eye.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "what's this?"

"Open it and see," cried the Colonel, giving vent to himself now in a roar of laughter.

"So you see we have brought our little Captain-General to terms."

Mr. Mayance, with an eagerness he did not attempt to hide, tore open the note and read the following lines:—

DEAR MR. MAYANCE:—

You will not go away without coming to say good-bye to us. You know how highly we regard and esteem you. You will not let a foolish caprice destroy all memory of past friendly days. Come! and let us say adieu as friends should—with a long, cordial clasp of hands.

Truly your friend,

NAOMI TORRENTE.

August 30, 18—.

The Colonel watched him as he read it, and saw his color vary and a look of indecision flit over his face.

"Having been bearer of dispatches, may I not be allowed to know what their nature is?" inquired he.

"Simply a request for me to call and take leave," answered Mr. Mayance, handing him the note.

"You will go, of course?"

"Yes, though to do so I shall have to stay over till day after to-morrow. No; I will go and see them in the morning, and take the afternoon train."

The Colonel acquiesced, inwardly greatly amused at the idea of Mr. Mayance still believing that the contemplated journey would be verified as proposed. Shortly afterwards he bade Mr. Mayance good night.

Mr. Mayance tossed upon his bed two or three hours ere he could sleep; and had not the fatigues of the day accounted to him very satisfactorily for this restlessness, he might not unreasonably have supposed that Naomi had a much stronger hold upon him than he had been willing to acknowledge to himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE morning is warm and dusty. The flowers of the little garden of that one particular house on the White House hill seem to be languishing for want of water. Mr. Mayance thinks this as he walks up the gravel walk he had never thought to tread again. The front door is closed, and so are the parlor window-blinds, rather uninvitingly. He rings. The servant girl opens, and ushers him into the parlor. Coming in here from the blinding glare of the sun, he cannot at first see where to sit down. He finds a seat, after a moment has accustomed his eyes to the semi-obscurity, on the sofa, and sits listening to the quick beating of his own heart. He has intended that his manner shall be calm, dignified, and somewhat distant; now he feels with annoyance that this impertinently beating heart is going to destroy all his plans. Presently he hears the sound of a lightly swaying robe, and Naomi enters. She wears a simple white morning dress, long and flowing, girded with a ribbon at the waist. She comes forward holding out her hand, a smile parting her lips, and says in a voice kind, yet not altogether natural:

"Mr. Mayance! I am very glad indeed to see you again."

Then she draws an arm-chair a little nearer and sits down, and he resumes his seat upon the sofa. What he has answered has been said in so low a voice that she has not heard it at all. He observes now that the morning is extremely warm, she assents, and then there is an embarrassed pause. He breaks it at last in a voice a little firmer, but still so wavering as to be sometimes inaudible.

"Miss Naomi, I have come to bid you good-bye, in obedience to your request. You say in your note that you hope a caprice

may not destroy all memory of past friendly feelings. Was it a caprice then that induced you to treat me so slightingly the last evening I was here?"

Silence, and after waiting a moment he continues:

"It does not seem to me that there could have been anything in my simple invitation to walk that ought to have offended you. I thought we had known each other long enough, and liked each other well enough (I do not mean to speak presumptuously) to make a desire to be alone sometimes perfectly natural and proper."

Again that shrinking repugnance falls coldly over her, but the room is too dark for him to notice the sudden contraction of her features, and she is silent still. He goes on:

"I have attributed your conduct on that occasion to a wish on your part to discourage at once and decidedly any hope in me of ever being to you anything more than a very distant friend. Was I right in thinking this?"

What! not one word to speak, Naomi, sitting there with bowed head and clasped hands, mute and cold as a statue?

He waits for an answer. None comes, and, mystified and pained by this silence, he says:

"Tell me something. Do not leave me in this suspense. Tell me, may I hope that you can ever be anything more to me than what you have been?"

"You may." The words fell from the lips of the motionless figure as coldly as pieces of ice, and all the pulses of her being are so stilled that they seem to her to have ceased to beat.

Has she chilled him with the contagion of her coldness, that he sits as unimpassioned as though he had not understood the purport of her words? Truly, it was easier for the artist lover to warm into life his marble love than for passion to burst into a flame in this icy atmosphere. But Mr. Mayance, lawyer as he is, is not gifted with great penetration, and he says to himself that it is timidity that thus constrains Naomi. Striving to

overcome this magnetic repulsion, he softly steals one of the little hands lying so listlessly in her lap, and says gently:

"You have never been afraid of me, Naomi, why should you so shrink now? I love you. There is nothing unmaidenly in your being fully, freely frank with me. You have told me that I may hope. Tell me so again in a little kinder, a little warmer tone, that I may believe you feel what you say."

The slight shiver that ran over her at the first contact of his hand is gone now. She constrains her uneasy and unwilling hand to lie patiently in his, struggling with a nervous fear that his arm may encircle her. She conquers it, raises her head, and says steadily, in a tone she tries to render kind and genial:

"Yes, I will be frank, Mr. Mayance. You know that our acquaintance has been very short, and we know little of each other's character or feelings. When we be better acquainted, then I can speak definitively. At present, all I can say is—you may hope."

Mr. Mayance thinks again that this is only girlish coyness, and is fully persuaded that behind all this repression (for so he deems it) she conceals just as much love for him as he has for her. Well pleased at having accomplished infinitely more than he had hoped to since their altercation, he concludes that the wisest plan (and under the real circumstances it was undoubtedly so) is not to alarm her sensitive modesty with demonstrations of affection. He holds her hand still, but it is with all the playful gentleness of a brother, and says smilingly:

"I am content, dear Naomi, and submit to your will. According to this arrangement I am not to return home immediately?"

Perhaps she divines these last thoughts, perhaps she feels them; at any rate a change comes over her, something of life and animation comes back to her face and into her manner. She smiles and reaches her other hand to him:

"O! no! no!" she says, "stay and come and see us just as you used to."

"But you will not, just as *you* used to, refuse to walk with me?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then," he says, rising, "as this is something of a change in my plan of operations, I must leave you for the present. Till this evening, *au revoir*."

He still holds her hands, but without even kissing them, with only a warm, tender pressure. So he leaves her.

It is such an unspeakable relief to be alone, that when the door closes after him she sinks down in her arm-chair, and so remains for several minutes, quite unequal to the exertion of going up stairs. She rouses at last, and slowly, wearedly mounts. At sight of her her mother cries out:

"Why, Naomi, what is the matter? You are as white as a corpse!"

And Naomi, walking to the mirror, is almost startled by the blanched face that looks out upon her. She leans her elbows on the bureau, and says, still contemplating herself:

"Mr. Mayance will not go home as he intended."

There is a startled, hoping, doubting look in the mother's face. She crosses the room to where Naomi stands, and, grasping her arm, says eagerly:

"Does he stay because you have given heed to your mother's counsel, Naomi?"

The young girl bows her head, and Mrs. Torrente, in a transport of happiness, clasps her in her arms. But, for the first time in her life, Naomi is cold to her mother's caress, and scarcely feels the kiss upon her cheek.

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE was a great deal of wondering among Mr. Mayance's relatives and friends as to what had thus suddenly induced him to change his resolution of going home. But the person who wondered with the most interest was the cousin he had spoken of to the Colonel, who, having lived in the same house with him for some months on the terms of intimacy authorized by their relationship, had a great fancy for him, and perhaps had in fact as much real feeling for him as the lightness of her nature would permit her to have for any one. She was not, as he said, *beautiful*, but a very pretty girl. Fair and aerial in form, with light hair, large brown eyes, and features just irregular enough to be piquant and harmonize well with her sprightly character, Mr. Mayance liked her; his vanity was flattered by her evident preference, and a flirtation which could be carried on with so little exertion or trouble on his part, was a very agreeable thing, and did not interfere in the least (as he thought) with his more serious feeling for Naomi. Indeed, so far from interfering, he soon found that, managed with tact and skill, it was a great weapon with which to combat Naomi's coldness. He commenced by carelessly speaking of her one day, saying that she was his cousin, young, pretty, and then, with some little lawyer-like traits of expression, gave Naomi to understand as it were quite inadvertently the high esteem in which he was held by her. He was not discouraged to see that the remark had no more effect on his listener than if he had told her that Miss Clara Sordham was the Colonel's friend and cousin instead of his. He never lost an opportunity of bringing her name into the conversation, and always in some

connection very flattering to her. For instance, Naomi happened to be looking very pretty, her dress was sure to remind him of some very beautiful, very becoming, but yet very different dress of Miss Clara; and he would advise Naomi to wear her hair in such or such a style, as Miss Clara did. Naomi's indifference was at first so genuine that all this manœuvring produced no effect whatever; but it must be confessed that at last this constant mention of another in a way which indirectly indicated that she was held as her superior became exceedingly annoying, though pride would not allow her to permit the slightest indication of such a feeling to be perceived. And yet, why, looking at it in a reasonable way, should she care? She had only friendship and esteem for Mr. Mayance, and if he thought another prettier, more engaging than she, why should it trouble her? It was only wounded self-love; still, if it had been Colonel Familiar's opinion instead of Mr. Mayance's, she would never have given it a thought.

All this while she had been gradually growing used to considering him her suitor, and acccustoming herself to the idea of the possibility of one day becoming his wife. Either from habit or from the development of some new feeling for him, her repugnance had insensibly worn away. She felt an augmented though still a quiet pleasure at sight of him, and an increased void in his absence. Lastly, without acknowledging it to herself, she began to wonder with a little sense of wounded pride why he, occupying the position of a declared and half-accepted lover, was in all save words and looks as cold as a distant freind. This was exactly the point to which, with rare patience and perseverance, he had struggled to bring her, and to which end he had with nice discernment combined the most efficient means.

They were alone one evening, Mrs. Torrente having early stolen off to bed. Naomi had been playing, and was sitting silently now, with her fingers on the keys, when, for the first time, his arm ventured to glide softly round her waist, and looking tenderly at her, he said:

"Naomi, I want what I have never had from you, a kiss."

Altogether taken by surprise, she started, glowed with sudden shame, and shrank back, saying hurriedly:

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"Why, surely," he said laughing, "you might grant with propriety, what Clara, to whom I am nothing, does not hesitate to yield me."

Clara again? The name stung her sharply. She struggled to conceal her anger, but it was at last too strong for her.

"I do not care what your cousin *Clara* does," she said with a brighter crimson on her cheek, and pouting her disdainful lip. "And after you telling me *that*, I certainly should not give you a kiss, even if I wanted to."

"But, if I promise not to kiss her again, Naomi?"

"It is nothing to me how often you kiss her—only *if you do kiss* HER, of course, *you cannot kiss* ME."

"I will not again—and you will give me one—only one?" and this time it was granted after a little resistance.

Six weeks after their reconciliation, Mr. Mayance told Naomi one evening that business imperatively demanded that he should go home for a few days, it might not be for more than three days—possibly it might be a week—certainly not more. He should write on his arrival, and expect an immediate answer.

"And now, Naomi," he said, "don't let me go away leaving things in such an indefinite way as this. Have you not known me long enough now, to be able to settle things determinately? I know all I care to know of you; I love you, and I wish to know if you are ever to be mine."

Naomi's face was all shadows.

"What need to speak of that now?" she said reluctantly. "Are we not very happy as we are? Why wish to change?"

"Why, what a child you are sometimes! Do you think matters can continue so for ever?"

"Well! don't ask me anything about it now. When you come back I will tell you."

He bade her adieu, calm and smiling, but she without knowing why felt her eyes fill with tears, as standing on the little porch she watched him disappear into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the third night after Mr. Mayance's departure that Naomi, having gone to bed early, at the same time as her mother, to avoid the long, lonely evening, found it impossible to sleep. In vain she turned from side to side, in vain labored to concentrate the maze of thoughts that bewildered her, nothing would do; rest was just as impossible as sleep; and rising softly, not to disturb her mother, she threw a shawl around her and sat down by the window most distant from the beds, throwing it open as she did so.

It was an October night, warm, hazy, and lighted by a glorious autumnal moon, reflecting its rays on the trembling waters of the Potomac, and touching the sleeping city with cold, mystic lights that deepened to a midnight blackness the shadows where they fell.

There, leaning her arms upon the window-sill, and resting her head upon them, she let the storm within her have its way and whirl her where it would.

Slowly, unwillingly, during the last two days, a revolution had been taking place in her—a revolution against which she battled bravely, but without success. Old feelings had again come up with more than original strength. Not that she had even for one moment ceased to think of Mr. Mayance kindly—ay—affectionately; but there again, ignoring all changed sentiments, and obstinately resisting all reason, was that mortal shrinking from all love demonstrations from such source. She thought of his arm about her, of his kiss upon her lips, abashed, abased in her own esteem. She had been a double hypocrite; she had deceived herself as well as him, for at the time she had not felt

thus. Why was this? She sought with her clear analytical power of self-examination to solve this mystery. Was it that habit had blunted the edge of her senses, and made them traitors to themselves in obedience to her unconscious will? Or was it that his presence exercised over her some strange magnetic influence, forcing her to participate in some degree in his feelings while he was near her? She could not decide. She only knew a sense of wrong, and shame, and bitter self-contempt was rankling at her heart. From all this one deduction was plain—there was in her no love for Mr. Mayance that warranted her in becoming his wife; there was proof enough of this (if indeed such questions ever need proofs) in the fact that, if the caresses she had received from him had been purely brotherly, the memory of them would not have shocked and revolted her as it did now. Then arose the thought that he loved her—truly loved her, and that she had wronged him; for, though she had promised nothing, avowed nothing, yet was it not wronging him to bid him hope? And, then, her mother—her poor mother, whose heart was so set upon this marriage, believing it to be a settled, certain thing. Involuntarily she uttered a low groan as thought after thought like surging waves rushed over her. Her heart had ached bitterly many and many a time, but never it seemed to her with such intense and unmitigated pain as now. Alas! poor, isolated child! Not less isolated in soul than in position; it was ever thus she bore her heaviest sorrows, unshared, unsympathized with. She sat, she knew not how long, lost in these turbulent and tormenting thoughts, till she was chilled through by the dews of the fall night; then, she arose, and closed the window, and went towards her bed. By the side of it, moved by an irresistible impulse, she fell upon her knees—not to pray, she was not calm enough for that, but to bend her head beneath the influence of something purer, stronger, holier, than our frail humanity. She rose somewhat more serene, lay down, and after tossing for a while fell asleep.

It was not until after breakfast the next day, when mother

and daughter had sat down with their sewing in the parlor, that the former noticed her child's pale cheeks and heavy eyes.

"Naomi," she said smiling, "Mr. Mayance would feel much complimented if he could see your face to-day."

"I am afraid," Naomi answered gravely, "that he would be anything but complimented could he know the cause."

"What do you mean?"

The young girl continued sewing for some minutes before she answered, and when she did speak, it was in that steady, calm way so full of meaning in her.

"I mean, mother, that I do not think I love Mr. Mayance well enough to be his wife."

"O! child! child! I thought you had given up that waywardness which is the greatest fault in your character."

"I may be wayward, mother, but this is not waywardness—but simple fact."

"Fact that you do not love Mr. Mayance? Why, then, are you unhappy in his absence? and so enlivened by his presence?"

"You do not understand me. I have esteem, regard, attachment for him, but not *love*."

"How can you know that you do not love him, since you yourself confess that he is dear to you? You have never had any feeling of any other nature with which to compare it."

Naomi made no reply. How could she say that already, alas! in her life there had been a feeling of another nature, which had taught her the immeasurable distance that lies between love and affection, however true and deep. Mrs. Torrente continued:

"You may find your feeling for him cold and tame compared to the romantic sentiments of which we read, and which are very rare in real life; but that does not prove that you do not love him. It grieves me, and it vexes me, too, that you should let such foolish fancies influence you. I do not see what you or anyone else could ask better than a true, reciprocal affection.".

"I would ask what you felt for my father when you left

family, and home, and luxury to share the fortunes of a poor exile."

Mrs. Torrente was most effectually silenced for a moment, but recovering herself, answered:

"The difference consists in the fact that I was opposed and you are quite the contrary. Perhaps if you had opposition to contend with, you would discover how strong your feelings are."

Amused at this ingenious reply, Naomi sat with a half smile on her pale face, thinking whether there might not be really something in this argument. But a little reflection soon convinced her of its fallacy. With a long sigh she slowly shook her head, more in answer to herself than to her mother, and unconsciously fell into thought. Mrs. Torrente, with her head upon her hand, and her work fallen listlessly in her lap, was silent for several minutes; then she said very earnestly:

"I must not urge you to a marriage in the least distasteful to you. It would be the greatest sorrow of my life if I should have to reproach myself with having influenced you to an unhappy union. You must think and decide for yourself. Only I beg you don't let fancies and whims unworthy of a girl of your sense have weight in determining you. I confess I have desired, and still do desire this marriage, for I think sometimes," her voice grew a little unsteady, "that I may not be with you long. The young are always thoughtless, and besides this, you have grown so used to see me live along from year to year in this feeble way, it never occurs to you that there cannot be even the ordinary surety of life with such broken health. O! Naomi, you cannot conceive what I suffer when the thought of leaving you in the world alone, unprovided for, comes over me. Yet, even that, dreadful as it is, would be better, I suppose, than to have you married against your will."

"Do you feel worse than usual, dear mother, that you talk so gloomily?" said Naomi, hurriedly throwing aside her work and crossing to her mother's side. "Why, you are not old—not

very ill? Oh! don't talk so, don't feel so, and I will do anything you wish."

"No, no, darling. I have reflected that it is wrong for me to urge you. Do as *you* please, and then you will do what I wish."

No more was said, but Naomi, kneeling there with her head upon her mother's knees, wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Mayance was absent exactly the time he had anticipated —a week; during which he wrote several times to Naomi. His letters were, as most people's are, very like himself, affectionate and sincere, but with no thrill of palpitating passion breathing through them. Naomi answered all his letters at once; very frigidly, it must be owned, in spite of all her efforts to the contrary.

He came back. At sight of his face, beaming with the pleasure of seeing her again—on observing the unaffected emotion of his manner, Naomi felt a pang of self-reproach as if her own want of reciprocal feeling were some fault of hers. Her manner was constrained and cold; she hardly knew how to treat him.

When they were at last alone, he changed his seat from the arm-chair to the sofa beside her, and said gently:

"Shall I not have now my welcoming kiss?"

She drew away.

"There is no need. We shook hands, and that is just as good. You know I am glad to see you."

"Do I? I am glad to be informed that I know it; for really otherwise I should have been for ever ignorant of it. Well! let that go. Will you at least fulfil your promise to give me a definite answer now that I am here again?"

Naomi looked steadily at the floor, and made no reply.

Thinking that perhaps the slight vexation in his manner had offended her, he said in a softened tone:

"Have I not been patient enough, Naomi? You have surely resolved on something; let me know your resolution. This suspense is becoming irksome. Come! one word—just one; it can

all be summed up in that, and we shall know once for all what we have to depend on."

"I cannot," she said slowly, in a low hesitating voice, "I really cannot resolve to marry."

"This, then, is your decision?" he asked, his face growing grave and slightly pale.

She paused a while, and then, in the same not very firm tone, said: "Yes."

"That is quite enough," he said coldly, and rising abruptly. "Pardon all the trouble I have given you. Good bye!"

Going away thus! Ending everything in this summary way at once and for ever! Going away with a heart torn with disappointed affection and wounded pride. In the sudden pain that filled her own heart at this thought, in her almost irrepressible wish to retain him, Naomi felt that the fatality of circumstances had so inwound him with her life that he was necessary to her. Yet she would not be ruled by these feelings. Momentary impulses were false guides. Alone, uninfluenced by interest or sympathy which formed so large a part of her nature, unmagnetized by the atmosphere of passion, she had thought herself out *correctly;* and so it must remain.

"We are friends still," she said, holding out her hand. He took it precisely as he would have taken the hand of any one else in the world.

"Most assuredly we are friends, and shall ever be so, I trust. Once more good bye!"

He bowed with the same measured politeness, more cutting than the bitterest words, and disappeared in the dark hall. She heard his retreating steps on the porch, on the walk, and for a moment on the street pavement, then they died away; he was gone!

CHAPTER XXV.

FOUR or five days had passed. Oh! how miserably to Naomi. Mrs. Torrente, noticing the cessation of Mr. Mayance's visits, quietly asked what had happened, and was as quietly answered. She made no comment of any kind, only her eyes dwelt on her child with an increased melancholy that went to the young girl's heart.

The afternoon of the fifth day, more than usually oppressed by the dull weight of gloom that had fallen on her, Naomi threw on bonnet and cloak, and went to take a walk upon the Avenue; there she would see people, and her attention would be a little diverted.

She had just passed Willard's, when, coming slowly towards her, apparently entirely absorbed in conversation with a remarkably pretty girl, she saw Mr. Mayance. Possibly she would not have been seen by him (so at least she thought) had not his fair companion drawn up her eyes rather impertinently as she neared Naomi; and his eyes seeking, and instantly recognizing the object of her regard, a bow of profoundly respectful gravity was the immediate consequence. But there was no smile, no involuntary half pause. He bowed as he would have bowed to a woman of sixty, and passed on.

Naomi had felt cheek and brow flush at the impertinent gaze, and flush still more at the distant salutation; but the blood on her cheek had the sharp tingle of anger, and her little proud foot smote the ground with a rapid acceleration of pace.

So, then? What a fool to have sympathized with his fancied sorrow and disappointment! A very deep and tender love, indeed, that had found consolation for the loss of its object in five

days! And this pretty, elegantly dressed girl was his cousin; the Clara whose name had been dinned into her ears till its very sound had become hateful to her. How very foolishly triumphant she must feel, not knowing that she had not won him from any one, but was simply accepting what *some* one had rejected.

She turned off the Avenue in a few minutes, and, fearful of again meeting them, regained her home by a side street. Mrs. Torrente was still asleep. With bonnet and cloak dashed off, Naomi paced the floor, still occupied with this disturbing train of thought. Miss Clara did not know that if *she*, *Naomi*, should will it, she could draw Mr. Mayance back as easily as she could seat herself at her desk and write a note.

She would not do it, though. She let him know that she could be piqued by his attentions to another! she condescend to struggle to retain or recall any man, even though it were one she loved with all the strength of her nature! No; her stubborn pride could never stoop to that. So, with an effort, smoothing her troubled face, she persuaded herself into the belief that she would think no more of the meeting with Mr. Mayance.

Very early in the evening Colonel Familiar called, and saying there was to be a fine concert that evening, added that he should be happy to take Naomi to hear it if her mother were willing. She of course being so, Naomi was soon ready, and started—going far more to gratify her mother than herself—for in truth she was not particularly pleased with her escort.

The concert room was densely crowded, but the Colonel at last found seats in the middle of a bench packed with people. She did not glance around her till seated, and when she did so, found with a flush of astonishment and confusion that Mr. Mayance was by her side. This could not be a plot of the Colonel, for he, too, looked all astonishment. It was one of the strange, inexplicable chances of life, upon which our destinies so often turn, and which would almost seem to prove the truth of the doctrine of fatalism. There was the usual bowing, the usual mechanical inquiries about health, and then the concert com-

menced, and the Colonel became entirely absorbed in the music. Mr. Mayance's face was far less tranquil than it had been that afternoon. There was a slight tinge of color upon his cheeks, his eyes had a varying light, and his voice, when he spoke, quivered perceptibly.

Neither was Naomi as calm as she would have wished to be. Whether it was that the shock of so unexpected a meeting had started her blood to a more rapid circulation, or that indeed some pleasurable thrill had pervaded her, certain it was that her face glowed with new animation. Mr. Mayance was the first to speak:

"I had the pleasure of seeing you on the Avenue this afternoon?"

Something of sarcasm, something of light raillery was in Naomi's tone, as she answered:

"Yes; I saw you with your inamorata."

"My inamorata! She is not so; she is only a gentle, sympathizing friend, who does not trifle with my heart and throw it aside with indifference when weary."

Naomi grew a little pale, and bit her lip. His words stung bitingly. The implied reproach was not entirely groundless. Paying no attention, however, to the remark, she answered:

"I always thought you loved her, and I am sure of it now."

"You were always mistaken, then, and are still more so now," answered he, without thinking that he was speaking with a ruinous frankness, according to his views of diplomacy. In reality, though, he could not have adopted a tone better calculated to win its way to Naomi's heart. He continued: "What matters it to you whom I love? Had our last interview never taken place, I might have flattered myself that you had some interest in the question; but, as it is, that would be absurd."

Naomi was silent for several minutes. A thousand feelings struggled within her. Why, she knew not, but never before had she felt so warmly, so tenderly towards Mr. Mayance. She thought of his love for her—his true, honorable love. She

thought of her own dark, unsettled future, of her mother, and the resolution she had deemed irrevocable yielded before the combined assault of so many powerful influences; in a low, unsteady voice she said:

"Forget all that was said that evening—blot it out from the past, and let us go back to where we were before. Will you?"

"Not to where we were before, Naomi," he said, repressing the eager tone in which it had been his first impulse to reply to her. "If we go back it must not be on uncertainties, but on some fixed resolve of yours."

"You mean that you would wish me to—to—"

"To promise to become my wife. Yes, Naomi, that is what I mean."

She stammered in so low, oh, so very low a voice, that only a lover's ear would have caught the words:

"Well—I promise—that—"

He quietly clasped the little hand that nearest him lay nestling amid the folds of her dress, and, with more of ardor in his eyes than Naomi had ever seen there before, thanked her with a tender, fervent pressure.

The music suddenly ceased. There was an interval of twenty minutes, and the Colonel, coming from his entire absorption in the music (an absorption perfectly real, of course, and quite consistent with his prosaic character), turned and inquired in a very natural way how they had been pleased. Both answered rather confusedly that they had been delighted; and then the two gentlemen entered into conversation, which allowed Naomi to be exactly what she wished to be—quiet. When the music re-commenced, Naomi and Mr. Mayance sat, still with locked hands, listening. At some of the passages from the operas, replete with all that intensity of passion that only music can adequately express, the young girl felt her heart swell for an instant with its old, wild, inborn aspirations; but she turned impatiently from them. "Dreams—vain dreams!" she murmured within herself. "Delusions that serve only to mislead. There is a true, loving

heart beside me, on which I can repose with confidence and a sense of relief."

When the concert was over, Mr. Mayance walked with the Colonel to Naomi's door, there they bade her good night, Mr. Mayance whispering with a lingering pressure of the hand:

"Till to-morrow morning, dear."

Mrs. Torrente was already in bed, and Naomi ran at once up-stairs. She found her mother still awake, and longing to tell her what had passed, she lingered for a long time answering her mother's questions and striving to gain courage to speak; but something stronger than her will prevented, and she went to bed in silence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

About ten o'clock the next morning, Mr. Mayance rang the bell at Mrs. Torrente's door, and sent up his name to Mrs. Torrente. Naomi, anticipating something of this kind, escaped from the bed-room, where she had been assisting her mother to dress, at the first tinkle of the door bell, and took refuge in the garret.

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Torrente, on receiving the message. "Naomi! why, where's the child gone? What can bring Mr. Mayance here?"

Descending in rather a flurried condition, she found the gentleman seated on the sofa, looking as serenely happy as possible. He started up at sight of her, assisted her to her arm-chair, arranged with affectionate care the cushions for her feet, and, drawing up a chair, sat down beside her.

"I have feared that I should never have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Mayance," she said, with a look of puzzled pleasure on her face.

"Yesterday at this hour, Mrs. Torrente, I had no idea that we should ever meet again; but last night changed the programme. Last night I met Miss Naomi at the Concert, and had a conversation with her, which has resulted in bringing me here to ask you to accept me as a son. Will you?"

Mrs. Torrente was too much astonished to reply for several minutes. Her eyes filled with happy tears, and, giving Mr. Mayance both her hands, she said earnestly:

"I do, with all my heart. I love you already as a son, and can look upon you now, as I have so long wished to look upon you, as the future husband of my beloved child. I will ask no questions; I do not care to know how it was brought about; it is enough that it is so."

"I thank you very much, indeed. You know already my position, my circumstances; something, too, of my character; enough to be willing to entrust to my keeping the happiness of your dear child. What can I say more than that I am deeply grateful, and will strive to deserve the confidence you place in me."

"And now tell me, when it is to be?"

"Oh! that," answered he, laughing and shaking his head, "is a great deal more than I am able to say. It depends, of course, on the will of Naomi; and whether she will be kind or cruel I am still ignorant. Is she at home?"

"She ran away as soon as she heard your name announced. I understand why, now; shall I call her?"

"No; it is better not now; I will come this evening. Till then, good-bye."

Mrs. Torrente, after vainly calling Naomi from the foot of the stairs, ascended to the attic. There she found the young girl, thrown upon an unused cot, lying quite still, her face hidden in her hands. The mother laughingly pulled her to her feet, and saw that her face was flushed and damp as though with tears. Yet she did not look unhappy. Her eyes drooped with a sweet air of maidenly confusion, and a half smile parted her rosy lips.

"So, after all your whims and waywardness," the mother said, "it really is to be, Naomi—it really is to be?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STATE of indecision is generally considered the most unendurable of all conditions; and yet a certainty which is not entirely agreeable can scarcely be considered a relief; for hope, with its divinely cheering power, is always an element of uncertainty. Thus Naomi, now that she had placed herself in a position where to recede would be dishonorable, heartless, mad, felt at times like one who, in a nightmare, strives to move, and only feels that his feet are chained to earth; strives to cry out, and is only conscious of his utter inability to utter a sound.

Now, indeed, commenced in good earnest the persuading, arguing, importuning to fix the day. Naomi laughed at the persuasions, defeated the arguments, and, with airy grace, evaded the importunities. Well, when was the young girl to begin her preparations? Why? What hurry? Was there not always plenty of time? Two months more passed thus, and poor Mr. Mayance positively wearied. Truth to say, he had exercised an amount of patience that could only be explained by the universally conceded fact, that to men the pursuit is half the attraction.

One cold, sparkling morning, after having had the preceding evening almost a quarrel on this subject, Naomi, towards noon, wanders into the parlor, feeling rather dull, and much to her astonishment sees Mr. Mayance standing by the fire, his face a little grave—a little stern, perhaps, but yet wearing no expression of anger or unkindness.

"The morning is so bright and beautiful, Naomi," he says, after the first salutations are exchanged, "that I thought you might like to take a walk. Will you go?"

"Oh, yes. With pleasure."

She goes up, gets ready, and descends again with a sense of

relief, that he has forgotten his irritation of the night previous, takes his offered arm, and they start. They walk on down the Avenue for some distance in silence. His face is full of grave thought, and there is a shade of unrelenting determination hardening its lines that does not please Naomi. He says at last slowly and very quietly, and the tone of his voice and the import of his words harmonize so perfectly with the expression of his face, that it almost seems to Naomi as if he had resumed the conversation at the point where he had left it after a momentary pause:

"To-day, Naomi, must bring things to a crisis with us. I am weary of being trifled with. Understand, I do not wish to force in the slightest degree your inclinations; only I wish to know positively, beyond the reach of doubt, what your inclinations are. I cannot dally here any longer; my business calls me home. Are you ready now to become my wife? Answer frankly—answer decisively—for I must know to-day."

She hears him through silently, without any change of color. Her face, which she slowly averts from him, wears a look half dread, half hesitation. So, mute, unconscious of the objects she passes, unconscious of the many eyes that regard her, she walks on for some minutes. He gently presses to his side the little hand that lightly rests upon his arm, and says, in a tender tone:

"Pardon me, Naomi, if I have spoken harshly; you must acknowledge that my patience has been sorely tried. See now! Here, on Capitol Hill, but a few rods from us, lives an Episcopal clergyman. What is there to prevent our going and being married now, this very minute? Then there will be an end to all this hesitation and shrinking. Come, resolve! Say *yes*."

One last flitting shadow, one momentary struggle more, and then her face grows quite calm. As it settles into this expression, the color all fades from it; but yet her eyes are kind, and something like a smile hovers around her lips. She looks at

him steadily, looks at him as she has never looked before, and gently says:

"I am willing, Gaspar; let us go."

His only acknowledgment is the sudden lighting of his face, and a more rapid step, as though longing to hasten the moment of binding her beyond the possibility of recall. Naomi must have gone through all that followed like one in a dream, for like a dream she remembers it in after times. She remembers ascending a porch, and listening to the tinkling sound of a bell; finding herself in a parlor; a tall man with iron-grey hair standing before her; and noticing the motionless figures of two or three women about the room; then that she stood herself with such a sensation of giddiness that earth seemed melting from beneath her feet, and laid her hand in that of Gaspar; then, of finding herself in the street again, with the frosty air blowing revivingly in her face, and mechanically feeling a plain gold ring on the third finger of her left hand. As they walk on and on, natural warmth returns to her frozen hands; she sees that they are leaving the Capitol behind them, and realizes what has taken place. Gaspar laughingly puts a paper in her hand, and glancing at it, she sees that it is the certificate of her marriage. Naomi Torrente no longer, Naomi Mayance—*Mrs.* Naomi Mayance—now. She turns towards her husband, and leans a little clingingly on the arm that seems to her to be yielded with more protecting affection than of old. Then she looks up and meets his eyes bent on her with the inexpressible softness of happy tenderness, and answers the glance with a frank, confiding smile. Too many thoughts and feelings are busy within them for conversation. So they reach home in silence. Dinner is being served in the little back parlor; in the front parlor Mrs. Torrente is moving about. Gaspar takes Naomi by the hand, and, leading her up to her mother, says gaily, though reverently too:

"This is my wife, dear mother; we want your blessing."

And Mrs. Torrente, with flushed face and eyes suffused with tears, looks wondering from one to the other, and seeing that it is no jest, but literal truth indeed, says, with a solemn joy: "God bless you, dearest children. God give you strength to do your duty to each other."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE were long consultations now in the family circle, to arrange matters as speedily as possible for their removal to New York. Mrs. Torrente, as a matter of course, was to reside with Naomi, and she was impatient to see her dear child established in her new home. Yet, in her feeble state of health, it could not be deemed advisable for her to undertake the journey in the winter; so it was decided that Gaspar should so arrange his affairs as to be able to remain in Washington, going back and forth occasionally, until the spring.

It was a very pleasant, cheerful family circle now that in the winter evenings assembled in the little parlor. Mrs. Torrente in her arm-chair and her feet upon her cushion, paler and thinner than of old, yet with such a serenely happy face and manner that it seemed that she had nothing more to ask of Heaven in this earthly life; Gaspar generally bending over law papers, and Naomi with a book or some light sewing, seated near her husband. Something of the old expression of profound, hushed melancholy had gone from her face. A look of mild contentment and tranquil tenderness softened now the lines that of old were somewhat haughty in repose. It was not the mien of perfect rest in a perfect and completed love, that cannot even dream of anything more blissful than itself; but it was the face of a woman who has accepted her destiny and reconciled herself with it, not in mere tame resignation, but with a heart resolved to cling and pour out where it legitimately may all that it can from its inexhaustible founts of love and devotion. Doubts, and struggles, and contending feelings, in as far as her will had any power over them, had been laid aside as things she could have wished had never been.

Upon her restless, longing heart she had impressed the thought that she had voluntarily accepted the trust of the happiness of one who loved her, and to her nature, full of the noblest generosity, this consideration was the most sacred of all obligations.

As to Gaspar, after the first few days, his joy in the attainment of the long-pursued and much-desired object subsided into a feeling of calm happiness. In his nature there were no great depths of yearning tenderness and passion. Once secure in the possession of Naomi, the placid, even tenor of his life re-commenced. His manner, almost always gentle and affectionate, very rarely ever warmed into fervor, and, loving Naomi as he certainly did with the most ardent feeling of which he was capable, he was yet very far from comprehending the requirements of a heart like hers.

March was drawing to a close, but the weather was still unsettled. Mrs. Torrente thought that about the middle of April it would be sufficiently warm to enable her to make the journey to New York. The little house and furniture which belonged to her during her life she had decided to rent on her removal. Of late Mrs. Torrente, though quite unconscious of it herself, had failed rapidly. Naomi had observed with alarm her mother's increased feebleness, and anxiously spoken of it, but the invalid herself would confess nothing of the kind, and, on the contrary, asserted that the sight of her child's happiness was giving her new life.

Gaspar had gone to New York, to make preparations for the reception of the family. One morning, on awaking, Mrs. Torrente, without making any definite complaint, said languidly that she would take a cup of coffee in bed. Naomi bent tenderly over her, and said, anxiously:

"Dear mamma, do you feel ill? You are pale, and your eyes are heavy."

"It is nothing, dear," the mother answered. "A little fatigue. I shall be well in an hour or two."

All day Naomi sat by the bedside, watching her mother's feverish and unquiet sleep, with a dull weight upon her that she vainly struggled to reason away or shake off. Night came, and without undressing she snatched a few hours of sleep with her head upon her mother's pillow, and in the morning, seeing that the invalid's prostration was greatly increased, threw on bonnet and shawl, and leaving their only domestic in attendance during her absence, went without breakfasting to seek a physician. She found one at home at last, and obtaining his promise to come immediately, returned home.

Blinded and sickened by the daylight glare, so out of keeping with her anxious misgivings, she resumed her watch by her mother's side, and ere long the physician came. Mrs. Torrente seemed almost lifelessly feeble. She raised herself in bed, however, with Naomi's assistance, and listlessly replied to the doctor's questions. Turning to Naomi, he said there seemed to be a state of general prostration, which should be combated with a nourishing diet and gentle stimulants. Saying this, and adding that he would call the following day, he went away. How very unsatisfactory! No disease specified, no medicine ordered. How was the invalid to take nourishment when her appetite had entirely failed? Nevertheless, the doctor's directions were faithfully attended to, and the little table by Mrs. Torrente's bed was covered with wines, cordials, and every possible delicacy, of which she, at Naomi's earnest entreaty, essayed to partake with a feeble smile, always ending after a momentary effort, "By-and-by, darling; I have no appetite now." Two days and nights passed; two days and nights which to Naomi, sleeping and eating only by snatches, seemed but one eternally lengthened hour. The doctor's morning visit had been regularly paid, but no new directions given and no opinion pronounced. Each silently flying hour found the invalid more languid, more inclined to fall into short, uneasy dozes, even while sitting up in bed and striving to talk. If such a paradox were admissible, it might be said that Naomi at one and the same

time realized, and did not realize, her mother's danger. She realized it, for it was impossible for a person of her keen and clear perceptions not to recognise the combination of fatal symptoms observable in her mother; and yet she did *not* realize it, for no loving heart, ere it has learnt all the hard, bitter lessons of life by experience, can believe in the possibility of that awful separation from the beloved one. Yet, ever harassed with her boding fears, and worn with watching, she became so nervous towards the close of the third day that she sent word to a plain, kind-hearted seamstress who had worked for them for years to come and sit up with her that night.

Mrs. Drew, that was her name, came at nightfall. The invalid, though she answered coherently when addressed, seemed almost unconscious of what was passing, and took no notice of the new arrival. Mrs. Drew made up a bed upon a sofa in Mrs. Torrente's room, and, by alternate reasoning and begging, induced Naomi to undress (a thing she had not done since the commencement of her mother's illness) and go to bed. Lying there, with a light beside her, Naomi read Gaspar's last letter, which she had received late that afternoon, and had not till then found time even to open. He wondered at her long silence, told her how lonely his days were without her, and bade her be careful of herself for his sake and the sake of *their new hope.* In the shadow of the coming desolation that was already falling over her, Naomi felt her heart go out towards her husband with a truer, deeper tenderness. She ardently desired his presence, and fell asleep at last overpowered with weariness, with his letter pressed affectionately to her cheek.

Oblivious of all things, she had slumbered on for two hours, when she became vaguely conscious of the murmur of voices. Bewildered as one always is by the first sleep after long vigils, she was for a moment unable to determine where she was or what was passing. Presently her mother's voice, low and broken, said: "Naomi!" In a moment the daughter was by the bedside. Mrs. Torrente was sitting up, her figure very much

bent, and her head bowed upon her bosom; she spoke again with a great effort: "Naomi, I am very much exhausted."

In silence Naomi took her mother's hands in hers. They were cold and damp. In silence passed her hand over her mother's brow, bathed with a cold perspiration, that struck a chill of horror to the daughter's heart. Then, still in silence, but with an anguished face, more eloquent than any words she could have spoken, she turned her eyes on Mrs. Drew. The good woman's face was pale, and the hand she laid on Naomi's arm trembled.

"We can do nothing, Miss Naomi, dear. (It was the old habit, and could not easily be thrown aside.) We must wait till the day comes in, she may be better then."

She might be better then. Oh, yes; she *would* be better then.

The sick woman asked for some wine. Mrs. Drew gave it to her, and gently laid her down upon her pillows. Her breathing was fast growing hoarse and heavy; her dying eyes fast losing their discerning power. Her long, white night-dress sweeping the floor, blanched to the pallor of death, with her face hidden in her hands, Naomi sat upon the side of the bed, moaning in helpless, hopeless agony. Mrs. Drew went to her, and said in a low voice:

"Oh, pray, Miss Naomi, whatever you do, don't make an excitement. She is going, with the Lord's mercy, as quietly as a child. Don't let her hear you sob and cry."

Naomi's only answer was to turn and crouch upon the bed, covering her head with the bed-clothes. Thus she remained for several minutes, holding in unconscious check the wild impulse that was upon her to cry out, and dash herself to the ground in all the wild abandonment of desperate sorrow. But she could not bear this long. Rising with a sudden movement, and silencing Mrs. Drew with a look, she went quietly and knelt so close to the dying woman that their faces almost touched.

"Can you speak one word to me, mother?"

The lips moved; something—something like a sound came forth.

"Do you know—are you resigned to the will of God?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother! have I been to you the child I should? Have I done my duty?"

"Yes—yes."

"And you can leave me without fear, without anxiety?"

"Yes—quite—quite."

There were a few more words, but they were inaudible even to the strained ear that listened; then a slight shiver ran through all her frame, and the head fell; it was over.

Then, indeed, there was no longer need of restraint, and with a long, piercing cry Naomi threw herself upon the floor. Poor frightened Mrs. Drew, raising her, begged her with the most moving terms she could think of to command herself, but Naomi, pushing her away, embraced and apostrophized the cold, still form till she sank exhausted upon the bed.

Gaspar was telegraphed, and arrived the next morning. He found Naomi very ill. The agony of a mother's loss had deprived her of her own hopes of maternity.

Oh! it was well for her then that she had loving arms to receive her, and a loving heart to recline her weary head on, or else her desolate heart might have broken. And in that rude severing from the one being whom she had had to love her and to love for so many years, how near she drew to her husband! How it developed the clinging qualities of the woman in her, and made her feel as though there were no safety, no hope for her, save in his protecting arm!

CHAPTER XXIX.

TEN days after her mother's interment, Naomi, in company with her husband, arrived in New York, and took possession of her new home. It was a small but very beautiful modern house, in a delightful part of the city. Gaspar, who possessed refined taste, had caused it to be furnished, not extravagantly, his means did not admit of that, but yet with every comfort, and also a certain degree of elegance. Naomi had been in the house for days before she noticed any of its arrangements. Apathetically indifferent, or agitated by bitter bursts of grief, it was a long time before her mind resumed its healthful tone. Yet, as it eventually must, when sorrow does not break the heart, calmness came at last. The past receded, the present became more real. Then it was that she began to pass her days in the little library on the first floor, endeavoring to concentrate her wandering thoughts and amuse herself during Gaspar's absence in reading, studying, and translating.

Sorrow had, for the time at least, changed Naomi; not less proud than of yore, for pride and unconscious strength enveloped her like a mantle, but yet less ruled by these qualities, more dependent, and, above all, more alive to tenderness. Her exquisite figure was a little worn with grief, and her face paler, thinner, but far more developed in expression.

After the long, lonely day, how grateful was the sight of Gaspar coming home; how tender her glad welcome at the door; home, to chat smilingly across the dinner-table; home, to wander out to walk the long summer evenings; home, to sit beside the winter fire and read to him; while he, drawing near, would gently clasp her hand and lean his head upon her shoulder. In the many tranquil hours that they spent thus, Naomi's

affection for her husband was ever on the increase. It was not, it could not be, a perfect feeling *even of its kind*, for intellectually she was far his superior, and a woman must find at least an equal in the man she loves; but it was a growing attachment, strengthened by the tie that bound them, by habit, and even by a vague, haunting sense of something false and wrong in their relations.

It was one evening when sitting cozily by the cheerful grate-fire in the library (Naomi's favorite room), the gas lowered, and shaded so as to fall directly on the round study-table, that Naomi was reading aloud, and glancing quickly at Gaspar from the book with some gay comment, she saw that he was soundly sleeping, with his head on the back of his arm-chair. Naomi let her book fall into her lap, and, silently contemplating him, fell into a sad reverie. Such a sudden realization of her loneliness of soul as came over her as she looked at his cheerful, handsome face, and thought how impossible it would have been for her to fall asleep under similar circumstances! Fall asleep unfatigued, from simple weariness and indifference, when you are beside the one you love, and listening to the thoughts, at once brilliant and profound, of genius! She recalled the apathetic way in which Gaspar generally listened to her, the half-closed eyes, the reclining attitude, which she had ever striven to think were but the physical abandon of intellectual pre-occupation. He had tried to seem interested to please her, had responded to her smile, assented to her comments; and the sound of her voice had doubtless soothed him, and prevented listening from being irksome to him.

He still slept soundly. Naomi leaned over, and lowered the gas to the smallest possible flame, yet the room was not obscure; for the bright blaze of the Liverpool coal lit up the bright colors in the carpet and curtains, and danced merrily over the book-shelves.

"If here, in this soft, poetic light," Naomi thought, as she watched it, "were sitting two beings, whose souls were bound

together by the closest affinity, and whose hearts responded to each other with all the power of passion of which their natures were capable, how sweet would be this half obscurity! how eloquent the silence of the night! And if, as I have, they had been reading of two who loved as well, but not as happily, with what great swelling hearts would they turn to look into each other's eyes, and realize their infinitude of bliss."

Though Naomi, in the loyalty of her nature, had not dared to connect herself, even mentally, with this thought, yet the consciousness that, somewhere down in the great unfathomed depths of being, she had in reality *meant* herself, oppressed her with a sudden sense of remorse. "He loves me," she murmured, self-reproachingly and half aloud, striving to emerge from the cold shadow that had fallen so freezingly over her. "He is kind and gentle; I am his, since I am essential to his happiness."

It was ten o'clock; she gently touched and called him. He started up, rubbing his eyes and looking confusedly around.

"Why, really, I have been asleep," he said. "What time is it?"

"Ten."

"Ten! Let me see; where did we leave our book? Oh, I remember; our poor lovers were getting into a sad scrape. Well, we will see to-morrow night what becomes of them."

CHAPTER XXX.

GASPAR had always led a retired life, for which his quiet nature and methodical habits best suited him. He had had to struggle hard to attain a position of independence in his profession, and this had left him little time for general society. His acquaintance was limited to two or three well-bred families whose station and circumstances assimilated to his own. They had called on Naomi shortly after her arrival in the city, but she was in no fitting frame of mind, then, to visit or be visited; and it was not until the year had rolled around again to spring, that Naomi, finding that very many hours lagged themselves wearily away, determined to cultivate the acquaintance of these families.

The three visits were made in one morning. Naomi found the two first so commonplace and monotonous, that it was wearied, stupified, and half-inclined to turn her steps homeward, that she reached Mrs. Wane's house. It was very unpretentious in appearance, yet the aspect of the drawing-room indicated taste and refinement. There were books and music, and some pretty paintings on the walls. Naomi was still looking musingly around her, when a light step came through the hall, and Mrs. Wane entered. She welcomed her visit very cordially, and entered at once into a familiar, almost confidential conversation. She was about twenty-seven; tall, but well formed; her features moderately regular; and complexion fair, with black hair and grey eyes. Her appearance, manner, and conversation conveyed to Naomi the idea of a mind not highly intellectual, but yet intelligent and refined, and an amiable and affectionate disposition. No tinge of melancholy announced great depths of feeling; on the contrary, she was pervaded by an air of smiling, unconscious philosophy, which is not produced by any effort of

the will, but is simply the result of an incapacity for great emotions.

Naomi was pleased with her; and, rising to go, reciprocated very cordially Mrs. Wane's wish that they might become very intimate friends. The acquaintance did soon ripen into intimacy; and though there was not between Naomi and Mrs. Wane sufficient congeniality to engender love, yet there was in reality something more nearly akin to friendship than is usually found between young and pretty women in society.

In Naomi's home the days rolled their silent and monotonous course along. Naomi strove to hide it from herself; and finding that this might not be, attributed it to everything but the right cause; but the ever-present, inexorable fact would not be ignored; her life was cold and desolate, as a shrine put up for holy fires to burn upon, but deserted when the first feeble flame has flickered out. But she roused and battled bravely with these feelings. Often, when by Gaspar's side, she felt this strange, this aching void, she would steal to him, and, kneeling, wind her arms about him. Oh, how she longed in such moments to lay her soul bare to him; to find rest in his strength; to have him comprehend and counsel her! But, alas! there had never been any soul-communion here; there could be none. She had such an infinitude of thoughts that he could not divine, such great heart-yearnings with which he had no sympathy. If he was busy when she approached him thus, he would kindly pat and kiss her cheek, and gently put her aside; if not, he would hold her to him, resting his head upon hers—quietly content—or perhaps, as Naomi would sometimes think bitterly, quietly *indifferent.*

Again and again the old experience renewed; the old, silent, resigned, falling back upon herself; the old gathering herself up for a new effort, for every step in this barren life was an effort.

There was but one consolation for her—she made her husband happy. He was dear to her; yes, strange, incongruous as it

may seem, he *was* dear to her. She could not banish, but she could hide these yearnings. She must learn to be satisfied with what he had to give. Looking around for something in which to interest herself, and remembering her old ardent passion for vocal music, she immediately obtained a piano, and a professor to instruct her. It was for weeks and months a spell of enchantment. It brought back all her old enthusiasm; and dim, far away in the immeasurable distance of what might have been, but was not, and never could be now, the old dreams came floating back, as rainbow-tinted and unsubstantial as the sunset palaces of clouds; and O, more beautiful in their unreality than the brightest realization can ever be!

Gaspar's profession had always kept him much from home during the day, and late in the fall of the second year of their marriage he joined a club, so that now not only days, but many evenings, were passed entirely alone. At first she remonstrated, but finding that Gaspar, refusing either to dispute or discuss, quietly pursued his own course, she sombrely resigned herself to this new darkening of her before shadowed life.

In the lengthening evenings, listening to the pattering rain and the sighing wind that strewed the ground with leaves, Naomi paced sometimes her bedroom, sometimes the parlor floor, and thought. As a girl, she had felt the isolation of a woman's life; as a married woman, she had realized her utter dependence and helplessness. Naomi's was an exceptional nature. She was not one of those women who enter a husband's house claiming everything, and believing that everything there belongs more to them than to him. With her clear, unswerving ideas of equity, Naomi could never come to *feel* her right, and consequently the sense of dependence was to her a continual sense of humiliation. Turning her eyes abroad, she everywhere saw woman helpless and dependent, not from any inherent incapacity to help and sustain herself, but from the laws of society. Everywhere oppressed by the injustice of man—everywhere, in one word, *enslaved*—for chains are none

the less chains because they be of gold and wreathed with flowers.

If any of the innumerable misfortunes of life, which no one has taken into account in framing laws for her government, throw her upon the world deprived of man's protection, she must struggle then for subsistence against all the odds of such a position; and she, the *weaker* sex, must encounter and vanquish all the temptations that come to her in the guise of love, or in the form of gold to relieve her wants—*encounter* and *vanquish*, for if she fall, the brand of indelible shame is for her brow, and the crown of a *new triumph* for the head of her seducer. What is there for the single woman, who possesses neither means nor position, but a life of ill-requited toil in some one of the few avenues of industry left open to her—solitude, or temptation and oftentimes the innocent loss of her good name? What is there for the married woman who does not find in her husband a soul just and elevated enough to rise superior to man's laws and man's opinions?

Thus pondered Naomi, with that proud indignation that a sense of wrong and injustice always produces in noble minds; but, superior to her sex in greatness of thought and purity of sentiment, she did not reflect that it is women themselves, with their frivolity, their mean and petty rivalries, and their uncompromising intolerance towards one another, who are the greatest enemies of anything like the advancement of woman's position.

Has a sister erred—whose voice is loudest in her condemnation; who most unpityingly, most unpardoningly applauds her ruthless outcastment, while, with insensate blindness, she welcomes with smiles the sharer of the sin, who in the majority of instances is the greater sinner of the two? Who is it that most sneers at the idea of woman being independent—free to live single and sustain herself honorably, if fate denies her the man that she would choose? Who, but women themselves—each one unconscious that every time she lifts her voice for such a

purpose she tightens the fetters that bind her own hands? This is true of the majority; but, thank Heaven! there are a handful of women, every day becoming larger, that are juster, wiser, nobler.

The gall and wormwood of the unshared thoughts of these solitary hours, and the contemplation of the future, stretching before her as sterile as a Siberian waste, were not calculated to fan into a more ardent flame Naomi's affection for her husband. If he had grown more tender and devoted, gratitude and generosity would have bound Naomi to him with indissoluble bonds; but she was obliged to acknowledge to herself, at last, astonished at the pang it cost her to do so, that Gaspar had become strangely indifferent to her of late. Probably he was himself unaware of any such alteration, for changes in sentiment are so gradual, and steal over us so naturally, that it is not until they reach their crisis and some sudden event reveals them to us, that we become aware of them

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was on a cold night in December, when the ground was covered with snow, that Gaspar and Naomi went in a sleigh to attend a little musical soirée at the house of Mrs. Wane.

It was a long time since Gaspar had gone out with her, and Naomi, excited by the prospect of a pleasant evening, dressed for the occasion with more than usual lightness of heart. She wore a dress of white tulle, trimmed with black velvet, over white silk; no ornaments, save bracelets of jet and gold, and a little net of gold wire, with ball tassels on the left side, covering the back of her head and leaving quite unadorned the bands of dark hair that shaded her face, which lit up so beautifully under the influence of the least animation. Something which occurred during the ride, a mere trifle in itself, but one of those trifles so powerfully eloquent to certain minds, had banished her light-heartedness and saddened her face when they arrived at Mrs. Wane's door.

In his usual kind and almost gentle way, for he was extremely amiable, Gaspar handed Naomi into the sleigh, took his place beside her, and they started. The night was very cold; Naomi's cloak, thrown on in haste, was badly arranged, the buffalo robe had slipped from behind her in sitting down, and her feet were quite unprotected, yet Gaspar took no notice. As he drove, he took the reins in his left hand, and drawing off the glove of his right, buttoned his overcoat more tightly around his throat, then drew on his glove again, chatting all the while in a lively, happy way. There had been no look of admiration for the pretty toilette; there was no word of interest in her comfort now. And what most

sharply cut Naomi was the air of unconsciousness that accompanied this inattention. If he had been vexed or pre-occupied, that would have been a reason, or at least an explanation; but there was nothing of the kind here: it was the purely natural forgetfulness of one who is too little interested to remember; it was, in one word, the dreariest, deadest of all sentiments—indifference.

A low murmur of admiration announced Naomi's entrance into Mrs. Wane's drawing-room. The cloud upon her brow, and the slight bitter curve of her lip, added something still more striking and original to her beauty, at all times unique.

Mrs. Wane was standing in the centre of the room, in the full light of the chandelier, surrounded by a little group of guests. Naomi and Gaspar advanced towards her, and, after the usual salutations, were turning away, when their hostess said, indicating with a slight gesture a lady by her side:

"Mrs. Lindabel, my sister, Mrs. Mayance."

Naomi bowed, struck by the lady's exceeding prettiness. She was some two or three years younger than her sister, shorter too, but with a figure of voluptuous fulness. Her hair was brown, her eyes blue. Naomi regarded her with mingled admiration and repulsion. The eyes were soft, the rosy face dimpling with smiles; but there was little of noble or elevated there. Naomi seldom or never realized the necessity or the possibility of addressing a word to a person with whom she was not in some degree pleased, and this time the sense of repulsion was so absolute that she passed on with the simplest inclination of her head. A step or two in advance, she found herself face to face with an old retired Italian professor of music, whom she had met before at Mrs. Wane's, and who now smilingly accosted her:

"Signora Cantatrice, how goes the music? Will you sing for us to-night?"

"Ah! Signor Paulini," Naomi answered, "for you, who

know so well the capabilities of music, my poor voice would be but little entertainment."

"You are too modest, Signora. Your voice is beautiful. You have expression, too, which is rare to find in you American women."

"Are we all so cold?"

"I do not know that. I think you are afraid to feel, and ashamed to show it when you do feel. But we must have expression in music—without this it is worth nothing. There is a young gentleman going to sing; will you go to the piano?"

Naomi glanced round in search of Gaspar, and seeing that he was standing by the side of Mrs. Lindabel, talking to her, and talking really with a great deal of animation, she accepted the professor's arm and crossed the room to the piano. Several people sang, and at last Naomi, yielding to many persuasions. There was a good deal of smiling applause when she finished, and the old professor was delighted.

"Ah! Mrs. Mayance, what a pity it is that you, who look so Italian, who have an Italian voice, and an Italian heart, too, I think, had not been born in Italy! Then you would have been a great cantatrice."

Naomi listened to these words with a kindling light in her great dark eyes and a dreamy smile upon her lips. Oh, would that it had been so! Would that she might have given herself to art, heart and soul! Constantly surrounded, and pressed again and again to sing, Naomi's eyes nevertheless wandered around the room every few minutes in search of Gaspar. He was sometimes dancing with Mrs. Lindabel, sometimes promenading with her, or else standing quite near her, *talking* to some one else, but looking *at her.*

Watching from an extreme end of the large drawing-room, Naomi saw all this at a glance; for, though naturally indifferent and unobservant, once interested and aroused, she had that eagle-eyed penetration that nothing can baffle or escape.

She was not so absurdly exacting as to expect, or even wish, that Gaspar should be by her side, no one comprehending better than she the bad taste of public manifestations of feeling. Neither would it have displeased her to see him talking to a pretty woman, if for one moment she could have seen his eyes seek her, and with one rapid, magnetic look, unobserved by all else, assure her that she was not forgotten. But there was no such seeking, no such look. Gaspar was, for the time being, seemingly unconscious of her existence.

She pondered on all this, listening to the gay words of those about her, replying gaily, too, with a smile upon her lips, but no smile in the frozen depths of her eyes.

She was wearied early, and longed to go home; but she would wait his time; he should not think that she wished to hurry him away from society that he evidently found so attractive.

At twelve she saw him separate himself from a group and come towards her. He sat down by her and said, very kindly indeed, but yet with an abstracted air:

"Have you enjoyed the evening, Naomi? Are you tired? Would you like to go?"

Yes, she had enjoyed the evening very much. She was tired, and she would like to go.

They took leave of their hostess and entered their sleigh. Naomi, coming suddenly from the heated rooms into the penetrating outer air, shivered involuntarily as she took her seat. Gaspar, who had gathered up the reins preparatory to starting, noticed it, and, letting them fall, turned quickly to her:

"Oh, I did not think! You are cold, Naomi. Let me wrap you up in this robe."

"Thank you," she said, in a voice as icy and piercing as the wind that circled round them. "I do not need any assistance. I can attend to myself."

"Don't be childishly vexed. I did not notice it at first. I tell you I forgot it."

"I *know* that you *forgot it.* I am not *vexed*, but I do not need any assistance."

So, in silence they reached home, and Gaspar, with unruffled tranquillity, went to rest; but Naomi sat for hours with her head bowed upon her hand, lost in sombre thought.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was not a spirit of exaction or exaggerated sensitiveness that led Naomi to attach so much importance to things that were mere trifles in themselves, but which, in the innocent naturalness of manner that accompanied them, had for the first time suggested to her the possibility of Gaspar having ceased to love her. *Having ceased to love her*, she thought; but it may be questioned whether he had ever really loved her. He had desired her beauty, but he had never had any just conception or appreciation of her mind or character. She was a sealed book to him. There had never been between them one particle of that beautiful, mysterious sympathy that enables people to understand each other without long and intimate communion, and to converse almost as it were with thoughts without the interchange of words. It was an unconscious fault. He had deceived himself, as many men, and women, too, so often do. Passion had evanesced, and lo! there was nothing beneath it but the sense of obligation—that cold, outward form and semblance of something which has no real life. Yet Gaspar was not definitely conscious of this; he was not one to endeavor to analyze to himself his interior life; and besides, the change within him had been so gradual, so insensible, that it was difficult for him to know exactly where he was. He was considerate towards his wife in tone and manner; he surrounded her with every comfort, nay, every luxury, that his means would permit; he conceded her all the liberty she could possibly wish; and if he preferred to pass his evenings at his club instead of in her society, why certainly that was no cause for complaint. She had equal opportunities of amusing herself.

Gaspar was not an unprincipled man; he would not wilfully have faltered in anything that he believed to be his duty, but, unfortunately, he believed that fidelity and kindness, in the most literal sense of the words, were all she had a right to demand from him. Thus, when, the day after the soirée, he found himself recalling the voluptuous outlines of Mrs. Lindabel's figure, dreaming of her languid glances, and endeavoring to find some pretext for visiting Mrs. Wane's that evening, he took himself severely to task for such thoughts. "Come, come, Mr. Gaspar Mayance," he said to himself, "no more of this. You are a married man, sir, and Mrs. Lindabel is by far too pretty for you to see her often." After this he wandered back to his first train of thought, and wondered whether she were a widow, or divorced, or were living with her husband; and so, continually dismissing her from his thoughts for the last time, went on thinking of her for the better part of the day.

A few days after, Naomi went to make Mrs. Lindabel a ceremonious call. Two motives impelled her to this step, distasteful as it was to her; pride, in not allowing Gaspar to think, in not even permitting herself to believe, that she could be jealous of her husband's attentions to Mrs. Lindabel, and respect and consideration for Mrs. Wane.

She inquired for the ladies, mentally praying that Mrs. Lindabel might be from home. Her prayer, however, was quite in vain; both ladies were at home and in the parlor.

Yes, truly; there was Mrs. Lindabel in a rose-colored dressing gown, embroidered slippers, and hair à la Eugénie, looking very charming. Mrs. Wane was really very glad to see Naomi; her sister was affable, with that empty affability which Naomi perfecly understood—for there most *assuredly* is an electric something more expressive, more convincing than words, or looks, or manner, by which we *feel*, if not completely, at least to a great degree, what are people's *real* sentiments towards us, and make our own felt in return. Naomi gathered from the

conversation that Mrs. Lindabel's husband had gone South on business to pass the winter, and that the lady, feeling somewhat lonely in Philadelphia, her established home, had come to pass some time with her sister.

Naomi, after a short call, went through with the required formalities, and took her leave.

But three or four days had elapsed, when Mr. and Mrs. Wane, accompanied by Mrs. Lindabel, called on Naomi, just at the verge of evening, on their way to the theatre. They had not the slightest intention of staying any longer than merely to say, "How do you do;" but Gaspar, who had not yet gone out for the evening, seconded Naomi's polite invitations to spend the evening, by such warm solicitations, that the ladies yielded at last, and laid aside bonnets and cloaks, and concluded to spend a social hour.

There were cards, and music, and conversation; Naomi, laughing over the card-table, admiring the music, or listening, as though entirely absorbed, to Mrs. Wane—who was extremely fond of talking—did not lose a look or gesture of Gaspar. There was nothing sufficiently marked in his attentions to attract the notice of any one else; but for Naomi there was a world of meaning in the furtive glances and in the conscious guarded manner. Yet, whatever inward effect this produced upon Naomi, there were, to the casual observer, no outward signs. Calm and smiling, she moved about with her aerial yet stately grace, and bade a polite good night to all.

Alone with his wife, Gaspar seemed a little embarrassed, and walked about the room, affecting to arrange books and music, to avoid meeting her eyes. She stood for a minute, looking out into the cold, deserted street, lit up by a brilliant moon, and on turning round, saw Gaspar pick from the floor, at the foot of the chair where Mrs. Lindabel had sat, the rose she had worn in her bosom.

"A pretty rose," he said, "'tis a pity she lost it;" and he laid

it carefully on the mantel-piece. Naomi slowly approached: "It will only wither there," she said, in a tone a little husky; "it is better to dispose of it at once;" and, taking it up for one moment, she crushed the frail leaves in her hand with an iron grasp; and then, with a contemptuous smile, tossed them into the flames.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was through long months of pain and humiliation, while watching her husband's ever-increasing indifference to herself and growing passion for another, that Naomi arrived at last at the conviction that he had not wandered from her as men so often do even from the women they best love, but that she had in reality no hold whatever on his affections. Wounded, galled, wretched as such knowledge made her, it did not strike at the deepest, truest, holiest love of her life, as this fatal experience does in the lives of many miserable women. Naomi's affection for her husband had never been an independent sentiment, but grounded entirely on his feeling for her, it very naturally died with that which had not only given, but sustained its life. She suffered, but it was from outraged pride, an indignant sense of his ingratitude, and the appalling solitude of heart and position, that left her homeless, friendless, almost hopeless.

Was this to go on so for ever? Was she to live in that house, unloving and unloved, a humiliation to herself, a burden and constraint to him? Could all the laws of legislators, all the benedictions of religion, make anything useful or holy proceed from such relations? Had Naomi been like other women, very differently would she have reasoned. "I am his wife," would she have said to herself, "and it is my right to be supported by him. He does not love me; well, let him amuse himself, and so will I myself." But for Naomi such arguments could have no weight. His wife! She shrank from the degradation of a wifehood where all, save materialism, had died. Her right to be supported! What right had she, unless she were in very

truth the half of his life, whose place none other could supply? Amuse herself! No. While she bore his name she would respect it; while she lived beneath his roof, not only should no act of hers dishonor him, but no levity of conduct should cast the slightest shadow of contempt upon him.

But this could not last; her life could not be one long, useless sacrifice. But she would not act from any rash impulse. She would reflect well on what she did, so that when it should be too late for recall it might not linger in her memory as an everlasting regret. She would speak to Gaspar with loyal frankness. She would penetrate to the depths of his heart, and see if indeed there was any feeling there for her that rendered her presence in his home necessary to his happiness.

Once definitely decided upon a plan of action, there was no vacillation or temporizing possible in a person of Naomi's nature. On the evening of the very day that she arrived at this determination, she resolved to put it into execution.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a June night, warm, but refreshed by a gentle breeze. Naomi, too much pre-occupied by intense and painful thought to concentrate her attention on any external thing, had passed the day in almost entire idleness, and dined in abstracted silence, deferring the hour of the decisive interview till Gaspar's return at night.

Unable to rest anywhere, oppressed with a sense of dread and anxiety, which she cannot avoid feeling, though she will not allow it to influence her, she wanders down to the library as the evening wears on, lights the gas, and sits down with a book in her hand to await her husband's return, knowing that he always enters here for a few minutes to arrange his law papers for the next day before going up-stairs.

Naomi wears a white negligé; her hair, arranged in its usual simple fashion, is pushed off her brow, as though even that light weight oppressed her. She rarely ever has color, but her face cannot be called colorless to-night—it is ashy, and there are great dark circles around her eyes, that tend to increase the apparent size of those large, melancholy orbs. She tries to read; goes faithfully down the page, beginning at the first and ending at the last word; turns the leaf, and so on down again. Then she pauses. What is it that she has read? Not one idea in connection with it has passed through her brain. Impossible to read; she throws the book aside, rises, and goes to the window. The cool night air blows refreshingly upon her heated brow. The night is clear, but moonless; she cannot see the passers-by, but she can hear their feet upon the walk, some slow some hurrying, which blending with the roar of the city muffled by distance, sounds like the murmur of the great wail-

ing ocean. A sense of desolation creeps shiveringly over her, and she seems to feel herself already one of that vast pushing, jostling crowd, each one, regardless of the others, pressing forward for the attainment of his own aims.

Oh, how interminable is the night! What an eternity is each hour between the striking of the clocks! She walks about, and sits down, and rises again; she takes down books, and puts them up; she waits and listens for twelve. It rings out at last, clear and full, in the air of the summer night; but it is somewhere between half past twelve and one, when Naomi hears the night-key turn in the lock, and a moment after, Gaspar's steps in the hall. She hears this with a pang of heart, equal to a physical pain, and turns, for a moment, sick and faint. Yet she sits there, by the centre-table, the light falling full on her, perfectly composed, one would say, if it were not for that ashen face.

The back of the chair in which Naomi sits so effectually conceals her from view, that Gaspar nearly reaches the table before he perceives her. When he does, he stops short with astonishment, and says:

"What! you up so late, Naomi, and here, too? Is anything the matter?"

It is a minute before she answers; her voice has died away in her throat. At last she says, in a low and broken tone:

"No; nothing is the matter, but there is something that I must say to you to-night, ere I sleep."

"Why, it is late," he says, throwing his hat upon the table, and taking a seat opposite to her, "and I am tired; this is a singular hour to select for a conversation. Is it something very important? Can't it be deferred till to-morrow?"

"It is late, I know, but it is the most fitting hour for what I have to say—I will be brief. The matter can be summed up in a few words. Gaspar, I am a most unhappy woman; and here, to-night, we must look into the causes of this unhappiness; banish it, if it be imaginary, if it be real, endeavor to seek the remedy."

"Which means," Gaspar answers, his cheeks slightly flushed, and a little emotion quivering in his voice, "that you are jealous of my friendship for Mrs. Lindabel."

"Call things by their right name," she says, turning full upon him, her eyes flashing with a sudden light, and her voice swelling to its usual clear, sonorous tone, "but I have no reproach to make you with regard to Mrs. Lindabel, whatever your sentiments may be towards her; for, I know that feelings of this nature are involuntary, and not under our control, though our actions are, and in this respect, I must do you the justice to say, that you have had consideration enough not to utterly outrage your wife's dignity. I esteem the principle in you, but I do not thank you for it; the formality of a cold, forced fidelity can be of no value to me. No; what I wish to say, is quite another thing. Day after day, for months, the conviction has been stealing over me, that you have ceased to love me; that, in very truth, I am no more to you than would be any other one on earth, to whose presence habit had accustomed you. Is this so? I know that you are truthful, and I will set your reply before my own belief. Answer me, upon your honor and conscience, Gaspar —Is this so?"

He has listened, alternately flushed and pale. His brow wears a heavy frown now, and his eyes, voice, and manner, are full of anger, as he answers:

"The idea of a woman putting such an absurd question as that to her husband. You know well, that it is a duty for married people to love each other, and that is the end of it."

"I have not spoken of duty, but of feeling; I despise with all my soul, and reject, now and for ever, what you would dignify with the name of love. Answer my question in the sense in which I have put it to you."

"I shall do nothing of the kind; I should become equally ridiculous, should I allow myself to be made a partner to any such romantic and foolish proceeding."

"I *am* answered," she says slowly, and if such a thing could

be, her blanched face grows still whiter. "You are conscientious; you will not lie to me. Thank you for that. If you could, with truth, assure me of your love, I know, that under present circumstances (I mean the coldness that has grown up between us) you would most gladly do it. It is enough; there is but one thing more: We must separate; you take your way in peace, and I mine."

"A separation? A scandal for the public to discuss and delight in? Have my name bandied round from mouth to mouth, and all for what? A caprice of my romantic wife, who imagines that I do not love her. You must be mad!"

"I care not for the comments of your public; I care for right, for life, for happiness, and I will not offer them up on the altar of your pride, nor to the prejudices of the world. Continue to live a dependent on the sense of duty of an indifferent husband? Gaspar Mayance, you little know Naomi Torrente."

Quite unconsciously she calls herself by her old name, and in the haughty, erect head, the flashing eyes, and quivering scorn of the lip, you can see that all softening tenderness has frozen within her, and she has already, morally, regained the proud freedom of her maidenhood.

"I have no more to say," he says resolutely, taking long strides up and down the room. "I shall remain here to-night. It is time to put an end to this conversation."

She rises without another word, and sweeps slowly to the door. There, with her hand upon the knob, she pauses for a minute, attentively regarding him, as though she would weigh the strength of his determination, and her own power of will to grapple with *it;* and then she passes from his sight, and the door closes after her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

To be gone, to put distance, and time, and oblivion if it might be, between herself and Gaspar, and all the memories of her married life, this was the feeling that, ever growing in intensity, pursued Naomi night and day. But where should she go, homeless, friendless, solitary one? Anywhere; to toil, to suffer, it mattered not. No tie, no, not one, bound her to existence; and there would always be, for everyone, a piece of ground large enough to lie down and die on. In calmer moments, though not less firm in her desperate purpose, for she would have carried it out, even if she had known that it led to inevitable death, she revolved in her mind projects for the future, and vaguely imagined what she would do, and what her experience would be when out upon the wide world.

As a dear and sacred memento of her mother, Naomi had brought to New York all the furniture of their little home, and as it was not needed for use, had stored it in an unoccupied room. This she now secretly disposed of for the sum of one hundred dollars. This was all her capital; she would take nothing of her husband's. In her proud scrupulousness, she put into his writing desk a cheque for fifty that had been lying unused in her purse for weeks.

She carefully packed her wardrobe; the few simple ornaments she possessed, and her books. Then all was ready—the crisis of her destiny had arrived.

Ten days had passed since their interview in the library, since which they had exchanged no word; not even the ordinary greetings. Gaspar had slept on the sofa in the library, and been almost continually absent.

One night—a night of scudding clouds and sudden drenching

showers, Gaspar entered the library about midnight. He had been absent since morning, had dined out, and passed the evening at his club, and came home now feeling unaccountably wearied. The gas, lowered to a little spot of blue, diffused just the feeblest ray of light possible. The outside shutters were closed, and securely fastened; but the humid air came through the blinds, and sent the lace curtains waving through the room, like white, ghostly banners.

Gaspar dropped listlessly into the arm-chair standing at the right of the centre-table (the chair where Naomi sat on that memorable evening), removed his hat, and brushed back his hair, dampened and tangled by the shower wind. There was a gloom and desolation upon the room that oppressed him inexplicably; for he was not usually susceptible of these mysterious influences. He fell, physically benumbed and mentally stupified. into an incapability of thought. So he sat for several minutes, till suddenly remembering that he was sitting there with dampened clothing, and with the rain-air circulating freely around the room, he shook off his apathy, started up, and turned on the gas. Right under it, in the centre of the green baize table cover, a letter was lying; directed, as he could see at the first rapid glance, in Naomi's clear, firm, rather masculine hand, to Gaspar Mayance, Esq.

A little, just a very little pale, he picked it up, and held it for a moment in his hand unopened. Whatever shock there may have been for him in the intelligence it conveyed, he had already received. At last he drew it very calmly from its envelope, unfolded it, and read:

Knowing what you know, Gaspar, it will not, cannot astonish you to learn that when you receive this I shall have left you—*for ever* left you. This is no quarrel that may be reconciled; no alienation that time and reflection may overcome; it is but the simple *outward* manifestation of a sundering that in fact took place *long ago.*

I ask nothing from you. When I cross the threshold of your door for the last time, I leave behind me everything that is yours—even the name that I have borne. I sever with one decisive blow the bonds that have bound us, and take to myself that entire, unquestioned freedom which has been practically yours for a long time, and which you will now legitimately possess in its fullest amplitude.

I do not say to you, forget me. There is no need of any such injunction. There was even at the best so little of reality in our imagined feelings for each other, that all that appertains to our past must inevitably fade away, and naturally take its place among the many phantasms of this life that wear to us for a time the garb of truth. Burn this, and among all your possessions you will scarce find one trace to remind you that such a being ever existed as

NAOMI TORRENTE.

June 28, 18–.

He was very pale, indeed, and there were drops of moisture on his brow when he laid the letter down. Involuntarily his eyes wandered towards the windows, where the rain was beating with sudden violence. This wild, gusty night, where had she found refuge? At Mrs. Wane's, perhaps. But, little as he comprehended her, a moment's reflection sufficed to show him the folly of this thought. With a sudden impulse he passed rapidly from the library, through the halls, and up-stairs to their bed-room; struck a match, and lighted the gas. All in its usual order, but no sign of life there. None of the little articles of the toilet strewn about, no woman's clothing anywhere visible. Closet door stood open; shelves and pegs all empty. The same sickening air of desolation pervaded this room, and Gaspar hastily extinguished the gas and mounted to the upper floor where the servants slept. It was not till after knocking for some time that he succeeded in rousing one of them.

"What time did your mistress go out to-day?" he asked.

"Somewhere aoout ten in the morning," the girl answered sleepily from within.

"Did she leave any word with any one?"

No; she was sure she had not.

"Did she take any trunks away with her?"

Not that day. Some trunks were taken away by a man the day before.

"Did she go in a carriage or on foot?"

On foot.

Slowly Gaspar descended to the library, seated himself, and carefully re-read Naomi's letter. Perchance at the bottom of his heart there might not have been even a faint lingering of love for her; perchance her absence was in truth a relief to him; yet his heart was not callous, and as he thought of her, a homeless wanderer, because he had so miserably failed in the vow he had made to love and cherish—he bowed his head, overpowered with remorse, and bitter tears of penitence fell upon the words of that eternal adieu.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

FIVE years have elapsed. It is a drizzly, uncomfortable night in Paris, such a night as one would imagine would keep people at home; yet the environs of the Grand Opera House are thronged with carriages, and crowds besiege the doors for admittance long after every seat in the house is occupied.

It is the debut of La Castadini, a cantatrice who has obtained brilliant triumphs on the Continent and in London, and who now bravely comes to submit herself to the test of Parisian criticism.

Two young and elegant Parisians, who have just met and exchanged greetings in the lobby, begin speaking of the Prima Donna while waiting for the commencement of the overture.

"They say that La Castadini is very beautiful," remarks the taller of the two negligently.

"Yes, very beautiful indeed. I used to hear her almost every night last season at Milan. She is a great singer and a great actress, and, wonderful to relate of an artiste, possesses an excellent reputation. And this while she is perfectly free and pays less regard to conventionalities than the generality of people."

"Humph! she must be a miracle, indeed, to resist all the temptations that beset youth and beauty in her career. Did you ever meet her in society?"

"No; she moved very little in general society, though she was not only received, but very greatly sought after. She pre-

fers, I am told, the intellectual companionship of men of letters."

"Is she really an Italian?"

"Oh, yes; a true Italian, as you will see by her face. The overture is going to commence. She has a grand house to welcome her."

The opera is Traviata. The overture is finished, and the curtain slowly rises. No one pays any attention till the entrance of La Castadini, but at the first wave of her robe there is a sudden universal hush for a moment, and then a storm of applause. She stands quite still for a moment, slightly inclining her head, looking about twenty; and her beauty set off by the elegant dress of the character, is resplendent. She is certainly Italian, or at least Meridional. Her voice, pure, rich, and full of melody and passion, thrills the audience at the first notes. In the first scenes she is the lorette, the wayward, erring woman, in whose heart sleep the capabilities for better things, but so silenced, so put aside by the associations of her life, that they are only manifest in the feverish restlessness which drives her from one excitement to another. But when under the purifying, regenerating influence of love, Violetta rises into her nobler nature, then it is that the actress begins to send through the audience the electric thrills that the delineations of genius, in whatever walk of art, always produce. How inexpressibly touching is her remorseful tenderness! How beautiful the simple-hearted earnestness with which she cherishes the little bunch of wild flowers her lover's hand has gathered, and thinks with what indifference her eyes were wont to view her bouquets of camelias. As the mournful drama progresses the interest deepens; ladies sit in their boxes sad and silent; gentlemen lean eagerly forward! Her heart-breaking sacrifice, the long agony that ensues and exhausts her life, the last overpowering joy, that makes even death ineffably blissful—all are portrayed to the life; and when the curtain falls, grey-haired men have turned away to hide their womanish tears.

There is a tumult of rapturous applause; hats and handkerchiefs are waved, and La Castadini is loudly called for. The curtain rolls up again, in obedience to their wishes, and the tenor leads her on. She bows and smiles, crosses the stage with her majestic tread, takes from the tenor the innumerable bouquets that are rained upon her from every quarter, and is gone again.

A party of people, sitting in one of the private boxes, have been particularly enthusiastic in their admiration of the Prima Donna. They spoke Spanish, and any judge of physiognomy could easily have pronounced them Cubans.

The party consisted of four people. A gentleman advanced in life, with a noble, dignified face, whose hair, beard, and moustache, were almost entirely grey. He occupied a seat a little back at the right side of the box, and sitting by his side, in front, was a lady, some fifty or fifty-five years old, elegantly dressed in velvet, diamonds, and ermine, who, still remarkably youthful in appearance, must have have been extremely beautiful in her youth. In the centre of the box sat a young girl, who, from her strong resemblance to both the lady and gentleman, was evidently their child. She looked about seventeen, and was dressed with elegant simplicity in a robe of India muslin, trimmed with exquisite lace. Rare flowers were wound amid the dark, luxuriant hair, that was twisted into a heavy knot low down on her neck. The delicate oval of the face, the low, smooth brow, the nose that would have been perfectly Grecian but for the softest of curves that made it so delicately, so beautifully aquiline—the little rose-bud mouth, and then the eyes—the large, dark eyes, where a dreamy haze seemed to veil the too ardent fires, formed a perfect whole, that in the form of regular beauty could hardly be surpassed. Her figure, however, though well proportioned and graceful, did not correspond with the perfect beauty of her face.

At her left, and half in the shadow of the box curtain, a gentleman was seated. He was about twenty-eight or thirty, not

anything above the medium height, but possessing a most elegantly proportioned figure. His hair, beard, and moustache were black; his complexion remarkably fair for a native of a tropical clime, and his slightly aquiline features of a noble regularity. His face expressed a high order of intellect, and an imperious haughtiness of character, that would naturally rather repel the generality of people, and form a strong element of attraction to the few who liked him. He, too, had the large, dark Cuban eyes, with the difference that a little sternness was perceptible through their languid fire. His manner was animated, and his movements rapid yet exceedingly graceful.

From the first entrance of La Castadini, he had seemed forgetful of all else; only when the elder lady leaned forward, and said to him:

"Is she not beautiful, Justo?" he answered:

"Divinely beautiful."

The young girl's face clouded a little as she heard these words; and looking intently at her companion, to attract his attention towards herself, she asked:

"Do you think, Justo, that her voice is as fine as La Guicciomini's?"

Justo, his head half averted, remained immovable, and made no reply. The young girl waited a minute, and then drew suddenly back in the shadow of the box—two great tears swimming in her bright eyes.

When the curtain fell upon this scene, Justo's magnetized gaze was released, and he missed the fair young creature from his side.

"Why, Lola, for what purpose did you go back there?" he asked. "Did you lose all that great scene?"

"I could never be so absorbed in anything that I could not hear *you*, Justo, when you spoke to me."

"Did you speak to me? Pardon my inattention. You know how I love music, and it is indeed impossible to resist it when

so enchantingly rendered. Let us listen with all our senses, for it is a sin to lose a single note of this."

Tranquillized by these words, and a tender pressure of the hand, Lola resumed her seat. Nevertheless, spite of her child-like confidence, she could not help noticing that it was only when La Castadini appeared that Justo became absorbed, and that his interest in the *entrancing* music was quite gone as soon as she left the stage.

When the opera was over, and they were going to their carriage, Justo saw that Lola walked pensively by his side, her head a little bent, and her eyes downcast.

"Is anything the matter, Lolita?" he asked tenderly. "Why so sad, sweet?"

But Lola, with one rapid glance at him, bent her head still more, and walked on in silence.

CHAPTER II.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning. La Castadini was alone in her elegant apartments, situated in one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris. Seen near to, and by daylight, she looked not a day older than on the stage; judging from a rapid glance, and without hearing her speak, you would have pronounced her age to be nineteen or twenty. But could anyone have contemplated her unobserved, as she reclined in a large fauteuil, her simple morning robe loosely girded about her classic form, and her head resting thoughtfully upon her hand, he would have seen that no woman of twenty ever possessed that face. There were no lines there; brow and cheek were smooth as polished marble; yet from all the countenance, even from the eyelids drooping pensively over the eyes, breathed the thought, and vigor, and experience of ripened womanhood. In the perfect gravity of the marked features there might have been a shade of stern melancholy; but when she rose, and shaking off her reverie, called her maid from an adjoining room, her lineaments softened into their habitual expression of gentle firmness.

"Nannie," she said, "give me my things, and see if the carriage is below."

The maid obeyed. Her mistress rapidly and silently attired herself, and on being informed that the carriage was in waiting, descended, entered it, and drove to the Opera-House.

Though artistic and exact, La Castadini was cold at rehearsals. It was the illusion of night that brought her inspiration. The opera was Ernani. Several times in crossing to the left of the stage, the Prima Donna noticed an old gentleman standing at the first wing, who seemed to observe her with unusually absorbed attention. He was evidently an Italian, and his long

white hair fell round a face full of benignity. Something familiar in his countenance riveted La Castadini's eyes upon him; she frequently entirely lost sight of her *rôle* in endeavoring in vain to recal when and where she had seen him. When the rehearsal was over and the artistes were beginning to retire, she saw him leave his post and slowly make the circuit of the stage. Presently he approached her with a rapid step, as though he had at last summoned courage for an effort, and said, with a deferential bow, speaking English with a strong foreign accent:

"Pardon me, Madame, but I have surely known you somewhere. Was it not in America, some five years since?"

Spite of her perfect self-command, acquired in long and perpetual contact with the world, La Castadini could not prevent herself from starting slightly. She knew him now. His voice, his words, had instantaneously enlightened her. She was silent a moment, and then she said, extending her hand to him with a frank smile:

"I remember you well, Signor Paulini. Take a seat in my carriage and come home with me. I should like much to speak to you."

He bowed his willingness, and followed. They reached their destination in silence.

O, too many memories were striving at that woman's heart to let her speak. In her own apartment she motioned him to a seat, left him for a moment to lay aside bonnet and shawl, and then returning, took a seat opposite to him.

"The sight of you," she said, looking at him almost like one in a dream, "has annihilated for a moment the years that have passed since I last saw you—has carried me back to myself as I was then."

"You have fulfilled your destiny, Madame. You have become the greatest artiste of the day. It is a glorious fate. Is it a happy one?"

Her face lighted and glowed.

"As happy as any, Signor Paulini, I believe. Its intellectual

triumphs, its moments of intoxicating joy, may be said to repay one for the disadvantages that attend every earthly career. Yet—" She checked herself suddenly with a suppressed sigh, and added, abruptly changing the subject:

"But how is it that you are here in Paris?"

"I wanted to wander home to my own fair Italy to die. I am an old man. I have enough to live upon for the rest of my life; I have no family, and my country is my only home. I quitted America six months ago."

Naomi sat in silence, with downcast eyes. There was a struggle within, dividing her between a wish to ask *one* question and the pride that sealed her lips. The old Italian saw it, but, unquestioned, he did not dare to touch upon the subject. Her hesitancy lasted but a moment; the haughty indifference which was in reality her predominating sentiment in regard to the matter resumed its sway. She raised her head and asked:

"Do you remain long here, Signor Paulini?"

"I go to-morrow to London, where I have a little business, then home to Florence."

"To London! Why, precisely, I am going there, to see my brother."

"Your brother, Madame?"

"Yes, my brother, an *adopted* brother; yet, nevertheless, as truly my brother as though the same blood flowed in our veins. I will tell you, if you have time to listen, how it happened. It is a strange history.

"It was three years ago, while I was still struggling with all the difficulties and dangers which attend an unprotected woman in the outset of an artistic career. I was in New Orleans, and passing along one day on my way to the theatre, I was struck by the appearance of a youth of about seventeen years, who, standing on the corner of the street, affected to be reading some posters, but who, in reality, as I could very easily see, was lost in wretched thoughts. It was an unfrequented part of the town. I stopped and attentively regarded him. He was miserably

dressed, yet I could perceive that his figure was slender and well proportioned. He wore an old, soiled cap slouched over his brow, and his whole person was pervaded by that air of reckless misery always produced by extreme and long-continued misfortune. His face was slightly upturned, and I shall never forget the impression it produced upon me. His features were not entirely regular, but it was naturally a countenance of almost womanly beauty and softness. I knew this from its conformation, from the delicate whiteness of his skin, and his abundant locks of light brown, waving hair; but there was nothing of softness in his expression now. In my life I have never seen, and trust I may never see again, such a dark, desperate, wicked look as burned in the depths of his eyes, and deformed the fair lineaments of his face. It was just that indescribable expression of wrathful defiance that certain natures (not the least noble either, I think), when thwarted, outraged, impotent to vindicate or revenge, will turn to man, to fate, almost in their sacrilegious daring to Heaven itself.

"I was moved by a strange, strong impulse to accost him, to do something for him; but reflecting that in his mood he would most likely misconstrue me and perhaps answer rudely, I moved hesitatingly on. But I could not leave him thus; my interest was too great. I drew near him and stopped, not knowing in what form to address him. He did not turn; his fixed gaze never wavered; he seemed utterly unconscious of everything passing around him. I waited for a minute before I gained courage to speak, then I said:

"'Sir, you seem to be looking for something. Perhaps you are a stranger in this city; perhaps you would like some one to direct you?'

"When people have reached the acme of unhappiness, there is no such thing as surprising them. He turned his head slowly, and looked down at me with the same sombre gaze, just as a sleep-walker stares without seeing. It was full a minute before he spoke a word, and then he said, in a hoarse, suppressed voice,

perfectly in keeping with everything else about him, and yet in which an undefinable something denoted a natural refinement and some degree of education:

"'Did you speak to me?'

"'Pardon me,' I answered, 'you seem to me to be very unhappy, and I should like to be able to console you in some way. Those who have themselves suffered, know how to compassionate the sufferings of others. Tell me if I can do anything for you.'

"I saw with a sensation of joy his eye soften with an expression half wonder, half gratitude. Turning a little away from me, he stood for some time with his eyes bent on the ground, in moody silence. At last he said hesitatingly:

"'You are very kind, but I need nothing from anyone.'

"'O,' I said, unwilling to let him go without a last effort, 'don't reject what Heaven perhaps sends you as a consolation to enable you to bear your sorrows. Will you not walk along by me for a little way, and think whether I can be of service to you or not?'

"Loathly, as constrained by something stronger than his will, he joined me; walking erect, but with his head a little bent forward, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

"I said, as we passed along:

"'It must seem very strange to you that I, a woman, not a great deal older than yourself, should accost you in the street, and speak to you as I have. This will prove to you that I am different from the generality of people. You should have less hesitation in being frank with me. Will you tell me your name at least?'

"He answered in a low voice, that his name was Angelo Penar; that his history was too long to tell, and besides not worth the trouble; yet word by word I drew from him the reluctant confession that he was homeless and penniless. This was all I cared to know; I stopped, and drew from my pocket one of my cards and my purse—scantily enough supplied in those days, and said to him:

"'Mr. Penar, this is my card. Will you take it, and come and see me this or to-morrow afternoon? Meanwhile do me the favor to accept a little loan from me, which, when you find employment, you shall repay me, with interest if you like.'

"Before he had time to answer I left both card and purse in his hand and walked rapidly on. As long as I could see him he was still standing motionless in the same spot.

"He came to see me that afternoon. I was at leisure, and received him in my little room. When at my invitation he sat down, removing his cap as he did so, I saw that his finely formed head was intellectual, and his face, spite of its haggard, hopeless look, full of that beautiful ideality which indicates a soul that lives in dreams. There was great power of resistance in him, but very little of that rough-hewn energy that can battle successfully with the hard conditions of life. His slender, refined figure was slightly inclined to droop, as though the burden of existence bore already too heavily upon him.

"I sat down near him and said, as kindly as possible:

"'Mr. Penar, you say you have no family—neither have I; you have to struggle alone, unaided—so do I. This resemblance in our fate should be a bond of sympathy between us, should it not? It would almost seem as if Heaven had thrown us together in such an unusual way for the purpose of mutual consolation. I do not ask for your confidence unless you willingly choose to give it me. At your age the heart is very rarely ever corrupt, and besides, I trust a great deal to my impressions, and what I read in your face, and the pride and delicacy of your conduct, convince me that my interest is not misplaced.'

"He said in that discouraged voice of his that it oppressed my heart to hear:

"'It would be of no use to tell what has happened to me, because if I were wicked I might invent something instead of telling the truth; so, if it is the same to you, I would rather not. You are so strangely kind and sympathizing, so different from every one else that I have ever seen, that I don't know how

to thank you. I will say this much, though. I was wandering about the streets to-day when you met me, because my master, a man who keeps a marble yard, to whom I bound myself a year ago, got into a rage and raised a mallet to strike me, and I wrenched it out of his hand and knocked him down. After that I left the place, and have been ever since (it was two days ago) wandering about the streets.'

"'You have been cutting marble, then; do you know much of sculpture?'

"'A little. I love it dearly.'

"There was a sudden light in his eyes, and almost a smile upon his lips. 'Ah,' I said to myself, 'there is a great deal in this poor, houseless boy.'

"'I am so glad of that,' I said cheeringly; 'there is the hope of a career for you. I will think it all over, and we shall see. We shall not lose sight of each other, depend on that.'

"He stayed a little while longer, and then, with the promise to come again the next day, he went away.

"I saw him every day for a fortnight, and, coming by degrees to rely on the stability of my friendship, he told me all about himself. A most melancholy life had been his, in which there were no sacred memories of home to soften the heart and dim the eyes with tender tears. His father had abandoned himself to the vice of gambling from the boy's earliest recollections, and he lost his mother (he never said she *died*, but that he *lost* her) when he was a mere child. He venerated his father's memory, and never spoke of him save with respect; yet my imagination could easily fill up the blanks in his narrative, and conceive all the misery of the child's life while wandering from place to place for years with his poor, lost, reckless parent, in pursuit of new opportunities of practising his ruinous profession. Worn out in mind and body, at last the father died, and left Angelo (at that time fourteen years old) *alone*. Then followed three long years in which the boy, sensitive by nature, melancholy and distrustful from his bitter experience, was tossed hither and

thither by every wind and wave of adverse fortune, until soured, disgusted, turned from each better impulse of his nature, there remained but one step between him and desperation.

"He had found too little faith in man to be given to confidences, but to *me* he opened all his heart, and told me, I do believe, as nearly as he could remember, every detail of his existence.

"I took him for my brother, vowing inwardly to divide with him my fortune, whatever it might be, and be to him as true a sister as ever brother had. His gratitude, his entire devotion to me, knew no bounds. Ah, there never beat on earth a juster, nobler heart than his!

"Our destiny henceforward was to be inseparable. He went North with me, and in Philadelphia I placed him with a sculptor. I soon discovered that he possessed fine, original genius for his art, and an exquisitely delicate and fastidious taste.

"In the course of a few months he was so changed as to be scarcely recognizable. Encouragement, affection, home, had opened a new world before him. To complete his happiness, for he was very proud, he soon ceased to be in the least dependent on me, as his services were really of great utility to his master. O, I was so happy when I reflected that, with a little clearer perception than the generality of people care to have, and a little of that divine sympathy that warms and heals the heart, I had been able to accomplish this!

"Two years ago he crossed the Atlantic with me, and I left him in London established in a little studio of his own. Young as he is, and slowly as artistic fame is acquired, he is already well and very favorably known in London. All over Italy, on my arrival at a new place, a letter from him has been my first greeting. He rejoices far more in my triumphs than I do myself, and is prouder of his sister's fame than she can ever be.

"There now, you have the whole story. I hope I have not tired you."

"On the contrary, it has been intensely interesting to me. Ah, Signora, you have a great soul as well as great genius!"

"No flattery, Signor Paulini. I positively prohibit it. It has long since lost its charm for me.

"And now, before we say adieu, let me add that I have been happy to meet you, and should you ever again find yourself in the same place with me, I trust you will come and see me frequently."

The old Italian bowed with respectful gratitude over the hand that Naomi cordially extended to him, and with a lingering look of interest and admiration, in which there was a shade of sadness, quitted the room.

CHAPTER III.

Noon had just rung out in London. In one of the busiest thoroughfares of the city a carriage, after with difficulty making its way nearly the length of the street, stopped before an immensely tall house, filled with offices of every description. The coachman leaped from his box and opened the carriage door; an elegantly dressed lady alighted, and after bidding the coachman return for her in two hours, entered the tall house, and ran with a light, rapid step up five or six flights of stairs to the last story. Here she paused for a moment, as though striving to recall something to mind, then passed slowly along, attentively regarding the signs upon the doors, until she reached the last one on the right of the hall, on which was painted in black letters: "Angelo Penar, Sculptor." Pressing her hand upon her heart, which had a little accelerated its beatings, she tapped gently. There was no answer; and she had raised her hand to repeat the tap, when she saw that the key was on the outside of the lock. She turned it, opened the door, and entered.

It was a veritable sculptor's studio; flooded with light from two great curtainless windows, from which, owing to the elevation of the room, you caught sight of a great expanse of sky. The floor was uncarpeted but clean, save where it was strewn with bits of marble; and as you faced the windows a large screen cut off the right corner of the apartment. Two or three busts stood about on pedestals; innumerable statuettes and casts were ranged on shelves and along the sides of the room on the floor; and between the windows, placed there probably with a view to the advantage of the light, stood a very large but not very high block of marble, the top of which had already assumed the outlines of a beautiful female form leaning on a lyre.

This it was that most attracted Naomi's attention (for it was she). She approached and examined it attentively, endeavoring to determine what it was intended to represent. The attitude, indicated as yet only by faint outlines, was hardly discernable; but the head thrown back, with the face elevated towards heaven, was, though still very far from finished, distinctly marked, and Naomi was struck with admiration at observing the look of inspiration which the artist had already thrown into the face.

With the freedom of one perfectly at home, Naomi had thrown off bonnet and shawl; and was still contemplating the statue, when she heard Angelo's well-remembered steps coming quickly along the hall. Seized with a sudden girlish impulse, she caught up bonnet and shawl, and with one bound placed herself behind the screen, finding herself stumbling over and wedged in by plaster casts, pictures, books, manikins, and what not. She had scarcely time to balance herself in a standing posture, when the door opened and Angelo entered.

Naomi heard him remove his hat and hang it upon a peg; then, after a moment, heard him move slowly towards the window; pausing there, with his back half turned to the screen and looking abstractedly at the statue, Naomi had a fine opportunity of regarding him without danger of being seen.

During the two years of their separation he had grown much taller, and his form had assumed more of the firm and rounded outlines of manhood. His face was not visible to Naomi; she could only see the light-brown, clustering, wavy locks, pushed negligently behind his ear.

Presently his attention became concentrated on the statue. Taking up a chisel that lay near, he musingly traced the already delineated lines, murmuring aloud:

"It is in vain, in vain for me to strive to realize my conception. There never was but one such face; no marble, no canvas, no anything else on earth will ever reproduce it."

"I shall not allow you to slander yourself in that way," cried

out Naomi's merry voice, and with one agile leap she extricated herself from the innumerable objects that obstructed her passage, and stood before Angelo, joyously holding out her arms, her face beaming with glad affection.

He let his chisel fall, and staggering back two or three steps, grew as white as the marble before him. Startled into gravity in the midst of her almost childish joy, she laid her hand upon his arm, exclaiming:

"Why, Angelo, dear Angelo, did I so startle you?"

He mastered his emotion in a moment, though the hands he laid in hers trembled convulsively; and when she, with the effusion of her frank, innocent love, wound her arms about him, and rested her head upon his bosom, he stood apparently apathetic, making no movement to return her clasp. She saw it, wondering and wounded. Her arms dropped off, and half turning away, she said:

"Do you welcome me so coldly, Angelo, when you have not seen me for two years?"

"Coldly, Naomi! Coldly? See here," and he caught her hand and placed it on his heart. It is the excess of joy—of joy so unexpected—that stifles me. I cannot manifest it; it is too great for expression."

Soothed by these words, Naomi turned again towards him, rested her hands upon his shoulders, and steadily regarding him with a sweet, tender smile upon her lips, she said thoughtfully:

"Yes, that face has matured. There is still the old dream-light in the eyes, Angelo, but there is more of energy and purpose developed around the chin and mouth. You are the good ground where seed is never wasted, but *must* spring up and bear fruit."

"Ground that only *your* hand could have cultivated, Naomi. There is something in me that rebels against harshly dictated, arbitrary laws; I must be made to feel and recognize within myself the truth and beauty of principles, before I am willing to practise them.

"O, Naomi, how happy I was to hear of your triumph in Paris! Was it not grand?"

"Was is not, indeed! Do you know, Angelo, that I was a little—just the *least* little bit timid about Paris; they are so independently critical, but it all went off very finely. Do you know how it happens that I am here?"

"No; how should I? I should as soon have expected to see —well, Victoria herself, as to have found you in my studio this morning."

"I will tell you. The tenor of our troupe fell ill, and I was so anxious to see you, that I solicited leave of absence for three or four days, and here I am. I certainly did take you by surprise when I jumped from behind the screen. Did I not?"

"As much as if you had fallen from the clouds. But you are standing all this while; how neglectful I am. There is your favorite place by the window; and here is a chair which I will make clean in a moment. There! Now, here on this bench is a seat for me. Everything here, Naomi, is in a state of primitive simplicity; you must excuse it."

"Everything is as it should be in a sculptor's studio, I think. Oh, but I did laugh, Angelo, when I found myself huddled in there behind the screen, among such a medley of things as no one ever saw before. It is a very good plan, though, to have a place where, as Sir Peter Teazle says, 'we can put away things in a hurry.' When I first came in I stood admiring this statue, and trying to imagine who it was. You have made wonderful progress in your art. This face seems to breathe; one would scarcely be surprised to see her open her lips and speak."

Angelo shook his head.

"It does not satisfy me at all. It is Sappho, and I want to embody in her face the sublime inspiration of her genius; but I cannot get at any realization of my idea. Do you trace any resemblance in the face to any one you ever knew?"

"No. It is a sublimely ideal face, such as no mortal ever had. Why do you ask?"

With just the remotest approach to a smile, Angelo answered:

"Only to see if I had been original in my conception.

"Did I tell you in my last letter, Naomi, that I had several new orders for busts? You see I am getting on very prosperously for an artist. I live comfortably, independently, and pay everybody. I shall never make a fortune, that is, I shall never have thousands of dollars more than I can possibly use lying idle; but fortune is only valuable to give happiness, and here in this little bare room, where the hum of busy life reaches me and prevents my solitude from being oppressive, where I can see the sun-lighted and star-lighted heaven, surrender myself to my imaginings, and strive to work them out in marble—why, there is no one happier than I, and I envy no one."

"You have no room for thoughts of your absent sister," Naomi said, a little reproachfully.

"No," he answered quietly, looking at her with his deep, steady gaze. "I never *think* of her; she is a living, breathing presence, inseparable from my life."

There was something so earnest, so almost solemn in his subdued tone, that Naomi, moved by a tender impulse, leaned forward and gently kissed his brow. Then she said gaily:

"You have no engagements this afternoon, have you? Well, then, you will go home and dine with me, and then we will go to the opera and hear La Guicciomini, like two provincials."

It was beautiful, it was touching, this almost childish abandon of Naomi in talking to her brother. How she laid aside her pride, her stateliness, her dignity—all, save that unconscious dignity inherent in her nature, and spoke and moved with the ingenuous, innocent glad-heartedness of a girl whose heart has never for an instant wandered beyond the confines of her home.

As she had proposed, Angelo went home and dined with her, and they then went to the opera.

Though they occupied a private box, and Naomi was careful to show herself as little as possible, yet some one caught a

glimpse of her, and the report soon circulated that La Castadini was in the house. At the general buzz and turning of opera-glasses in the direction of her box that followed this announcement, Angelo laughed, and said:

"You see, Naomi, this is one of the small disadvantages of celebrity."

"Yes," answered she, "we sigh for renown, and when we have obtained it, we sigh again for our old obscurity."

"And yet withal it is doubtful if any one would willingly return to it."

When they parted at night, Angelo said:

"I am at leisure to-morrow; let me come and see you. You cannot like to scramble up the long stairs to my little cell."

"I love it, Angelo. It is the only place in the world that seems like home to me. We will do to-morrow as we have done to-day. I pass the morning with you, and you the afternoon with me."

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY the next morning Naomi sent Angelo two large boxes, one containing paintings, the other statuettes, which she had collected for him in Italy. They were all rare and precious works of art, which she had selected with great care.

On entering his studio about eleven in the morning, she found him in a perfect rapture of admiration, unpacking the statuettes.

"Oh, Naomi; dear, good sister!" he cried on seeing her, "how grateful I am for this discriminating remembrance; but it is too much; these things are too expensive."

"That is my business," answered she, laughing and removing her things. Wearing a plain, black silk dress, edged around the throat and wrists with black lace, her hair à la Madonna, and her face lit up with pleasurable excitement, she looked so young, so sweet, so simple, that Angelo forgot his statuettes to look at her.

"Now, do you know, Angelo, what I would like to have you do? I love this little room; it is just right for a workshop, but you ought to have another—a kind of reception studio, which you could adorn to your taste. Don't you think so?"

"It would be almost uninhabited, for I live where my work is; and then, I can't afford it."

"Can't afford it! People can afford anything when they have sisters who love them, and who are not poor."

He answered with a gentle gravity:

"No, Naomi; dependence, even on those who love us and whom we love, enervates and degrades, and most especially a man.

"I owe my present to you. I shall owe to you whatever I may win in the future. Of this obligation I never can acquit myself, nor would I if I could; for it is sweet to me to feel that I owe everything to you. But this is enough; it would be shameful for me now to accept aid from my sister, who has won all she possesses by her own genius and industry."

"Brave, noble Angelo, I admire and love you! You exaggerate a little on the right side, but that is well. May I ask you where you intend to put all these things which I have sent here, it seems only to encumber you with?"

"Some here, some in my bed-room."

"And may I ask you, Mr. Stoic, where you lodge?"

"My bed-room is there."

"There. Where?" exclaimed Naomi, turning her eyes round the room in astonishment.

Angelo laughed, left his statuettes, and, crossing the room, took down from its nail a very large unframed picture which had concealed a door, which he now threw open, and motioned Naomi to enter.

It was a room larger than the studio, furnished with great simplicity, but yet with perfect neatness. In the farthest corner of the room stood a small camp bedstead, draped with pure white. Beside it was a little table sustaining a gas lamp adjusted for lighting; not far off were some shelves filled with books, disposed in symmetrical rows, and beautiful female forms in plaster of Paris occupied the four corners of the room. The mantelpiece, too, was filled with statuettes, and it might have been this abundance of cold, white forms that lent the apartment the air of virginal purity that pervaded it. A rosewood writing desk, her own gift to Angelo in former days, stood on a table near her; Naomi picked it up, and carried it into the studio.

"Ah, now, Angelo," she cried gaily, "I shall find out all your secrets; for, it is hardly possible that you should not have some—Locked! Now, I am sure of it; when people lock writing desks it is a certain sign that they have something to conceal."

Angelo laughed, with a slight flush upon his cheek.

"You may have the key," he said, searching for it in his pockets.

"No; I was but jesting; though, indeed, it would not be surprising if what I said were true."

"Art is my mistress, Naomi; the *only* one that I shall ever have."

"Art is a mistress, Angelo, that will only make you appreciate more the charms and graces of an earthly one—for it is not all who are competent to artistically appreciate beauty. Art of herself is a cold, exacting mistress."

"Is it you who say that, Naomi? You, who seem absorbed heart and soul in your profession, and apparently never give a thought to any other love."

Naomi stood quite still, her hand resting on the writing desk, which she had placed upon a table; her face slowly sobered, and as the gay, bantering expression left her eyes, they gradually took that fixed inward look which in her always accompanied profound and melancholy thought.

"Long ago, when I was a very young girl," she said, in the monotonous tone of retrospection, "some one asked me, if, when I reached the mountain-top I sought to climb, I would not weary of the solitude that so far removed me from human sympathy. I said no—I thought not, then. I *have* reached it; it is very grand and beautiful; its sense of freedom is very sweet, but ah, *it is* cold, sterile, desolate!"

Angelo had approached her and stood listening, leaning against the statue of Sappho. His face had grown unspeakably sad—a quiet sadness—but all the more profound for that. He made no comment on her words, but silently watched her with some unspoken sorrow in the depths of his beautiful dark eyes. She came out of her melancholy reverie in a minute (they were very rare with her in these days), her eyes rested affectionately on Angelo, and she moved smilingly to his side.

"I feel thus sometimes; *only* sometimes," she said, cheeringly,

" when I am far away from you, as I generally am; when I am with you, dear brother, I am in a sunny valley where the flowers grow; and, as a general thing, wherever I may be I find within myself philosophy enough to make me happy."

He clasped the hand she offered him, but the mournfulness did not leave his face. After a pause, he said:

"There is a change in your face, Naomi, but I cannot tell what it is. You look in excellent health, you have not grown a day older, and yet there *is* a change."

"It may be because in reality I am not so well as formerly. Within the last year a disease of the heart has developed itself in me. The first time I ever felt it was at Milan. It was while singing one night to a crowded house that I lost consciousness as suddenly as if I had been struck by lightning, and fell upon the stage. I was so ill that I was unable to continue my *rôle*, and the next day, on sending for a physician, learned that I actually had disease of the heart."

" Why, how have you dared to go on exposing yourself to the excitements of your profession, Naomi, knowing that any moment, with such an ailment, a violent emotion may cause your death ?"

Angelo was very pale, and his voice trembled with agitation as he spoke.

She laughed lightly:

"I shall live as long as I care to. Old age may be desirable for those who have many ties, many duties in life; but for me, believe me it is the last thing I should wish. Let us talk no more about it—it but makes you melancholy, and there is no need of that, for I am very well now. I ordered the carriage to come early to-day, so that we might take a long drive before dinner, and it is already very near the hour."

On her return home that night a telegraphic despatch was handed Naomi from her Parisian *impressario*, requesting her immediate return. It made but the difference of a day in her original intention, yet it saddened her, and still more the sight of Angelo's face on hearing the announcement.

"You go at once, then, Naomi—this very morning?"

"Yes; I am all prepared. You know I am accustomed to these sudden summonses. You will not be neglecting engagements to go with me to the steamer?"

"No; but if I had a thousand they should yield to you."

It might have been owing to the thought of the triumphs that awaited her in Paris that Naomi's spirits mounted as they neared the steamer. Angelo went on board, and lingered till the last minute.

"Till fall, dear brother," Naomi said; "it will not be long."

He received her good-bye kiss in silence, and stood upon the street waving his handkerchief to her till she was lost in distance. As, with thoughtfully bowed head, he turned homewards, he said to himself:

"There was regret in her eyes, but her voice was ringing and joyous; and she said it would not be long till fall. Six eternal months—*not long! not long!*"

CHAPTER V.

It is difficult for time to pass over any one of us, even over those immured in the unvarying life of a cloister, and leave no trace upon the mind and heart. What, then, had been the changes, or rather the developments, of Naomi's inward life during these five toilsome, exciting, and eventful years? At the outset utterly unprotected and unfriended, her first great struggle had been to combat in herself the shrinking sensitiveness that had always paralyzed to a great degree the natural energy and self-reliance of her character. Arming herself with a cold stoicism foreign to her nature, and silencing oftentimes her noble pride with the unanswerable argument, "*It is necessary,*" she had forced herself to walk steadily along her way. Fortunately, youth and beauty inspire men with an involuntary sense of consideration, which saves their possessor from absolute harshness and insult, yet she had to suffer from the unconscious brutality of coarse, hard organizations, who, however little they might wish it, could do nothing without wounding her delicacy. Many a time, too, had she seen, with a cheek flushed with the honest indignation of a sense of wrong, presumptuous ignorance take rank before her, as some great flaunting weed overtops and hides an exquisite flower. But this state of things did not last long; her genius rapidly emerged from its shrouding timidity—was recognised, appreciated and rewarded. Through all, she had the great, inestimable advantage, that the licentiousness that pervades the stage never infected her. She lived in an atmosphere of her own, that immeasurably removed her from its contaminating influences; and her enthusiastic love of art and fervent worship of a lofty ideal strengthened her to lead a life of vestal purity. Yes, veritably, of *vestal* purity; for it was

not with her as with many, a struggle between sensual thoughts and desires and a restraining conscience, but the perpetual though unconscious upward striving of her thought, seeking to live in purer, more spiritualized regions. By a strange anomaly, she was in this respect chaster as a woman than she had been as a girl. Endowed with an impassioned heart and voluptuous organization, ardent reveries had tormented her adolescence. Mrs. Torrente had not sufficient thought herself to be able to philosophically instruct her child on this subject; she contented herself with teaching her that evil thoughts came from the Tempter, and that she must fly from them; and thus Naomi found herself in the chaotic darkness in which the young are almost always left by the development within them of an irrepressible instinct, ignorant as they are of the holiness of the purpose for which it was implanted in us, and equally ignorant of the only sentiment that can elevate and sanctify it in our relations. Naomi's brief, impalpable impression of love had not been *real* enough to ground a faith upon; and so, for years, unguided, save by the ray of divine light within, she questioned with herself. She never could be satisfied to believe that the mere ceremony of marriage could legitimize and consecrate what, under every other circumstance, was unpardonably wrong. She sought eagerly for some higher sanctification, but in the ignorance of her inexperience she dared not trust herself to form an opinion. It was this intuitive perception of the *true* that harassed her in the question of her marriage, and it was at last in the wholly earthly fire of this false union that all that was gross within herself had burnt utterly out, and left her, in her nobler nature, as ardent, and as pure, too as flame.

Fond of the society of men, preferring it infinitely to that of women, but simply because she found in it more intellectual congeniality and more liberality of sentiment; fond, too, as she ingenuously confessed, of admiration; loving the animated discussions and brilliant flashes of wit of the gay suppers where she presided like a queen; yet there were, could be, no tempta-

tions for Naomi, for she loved not. From the commencement of her theatrical career she had been beset with offers of every description. Young, gay men of the world, and old debauchees without number, had made her alluring though dishonorable proposals; and some few men of station and wealth would gladly have given her their name in the loyalty of their respectful love. To the former she would reply with a light laugh, that she did not believe in love (and truly she did not, *as they understood it*); to the latter, that she loved her liberty too well to marry.

For a time, while all her thoughts were necessarily taken up with her toil for reputation and independence, she was proud and happy in the freedom of her solitude; but the day at length arrived in which, these objects attained in a degree to which she had never dared to aspire, the void within made itself painfully felt; and there were hours when her soul went yearning forth in quest of the unknown. Then she might have said, with ideal Shelley, of the Unattained:

> "To thirst and find no fill, to wait and wander,
> With short unsteady steps, to pause and ponder,
> To feel the blood run through the veins and tingle,
> Where busy thought and blind sensation mingle;
> To nurse the image of unfelt caresses,
> Till dim imagination just possesses
> The half-created shadow."

Naomi was not one of those who can passively consent to accept dogmas without any positive conviction of their truth. It was an absolute necessity of her being, as it is of all earnest natures, to form a creed for herself, based upon her own highest conceptions of God, and of right as compatible with His attributes. To this she had come by insensible degrees. Educated an Episcopalian, and carefully instructed by her mother in the principal points of the orthodox faith, she had received these teachings even as a child in a mood half reverential, half questioning; but finding that all arguments on the subject confused

and pained her mother, she contented herself with confining them to her own mind. Lost, bewildered, as she sometimes was by her vain efforts to solve to herself the mystery of the origin of evil, and the necessity of redemption, she never questioned in the remotest manner the existence of God. Unsuspected by others, unknown even to herself, she was devotional to the profoundest depths of her being; not devotional in the ordinary acceptation of the term, for she loved not churches nor creeds, but devotional in the sense that her soul sought God with fervent, longing adoration and trust. This feeling grew and strengthened in her; and long after she had in her heart of hearts lost faith in the doctrine that had been taught her, she persuaded herself that she believed it, clinging to it partly from the force of habit, partly from want of entire confidence in her own conclusions. The silent conflict went on for years. During her married life she progressed but little. She learned to doubt still more, but it would have been difficult for her to tell what she did *believe*. It was in a freer, happier air, with a clearer spiritual vision, that a strong faith imperceptibly formed and consolidated itself in her heart; and this it was:

She believed in God. She believed that in his very essence he is love—pure, strong, infinite; and that we, his creatures, bearing within ourselves a greater or smaller portion of divinity in proportion to our spiritual development, draw nearer to him in all the manifestations of love, from the highest to the lowest, and in its beautiful, harmonizing influences of peace, pardon, and charity. She rejected the doctrine of the atonement, that is to say, the idea of an awful sacrifice to appease the ire of a revengeful Deity; but she sat at the feet of Jesus with the tenderest reverence, and accepted him as the most perfect typification of God that has ever been revealed to earth. As to the rest, she had faith in the vital might of Good, and consequently in human progress. From the frailty of our natures we may improve very slowly as individuals, but the enlargement of the sphere of ideas, the clearer perception of the true and just that

each succeeding age most assuredly does bring, are in a thousand places quietly working out great results. Naomi knew, when matured judgment had tempered her enthusiasm, that all steps in advance, to be permanent must be gradual. Ideas cannot be subjugated by force; they are more potent than all the arms of our material world, and can never be grasped and bent to the will. In all ages there are some few spirits in advance of their time, who can accept truth at once in every new development, no matter how startling, because they possess the keen spiritual vision to discern and recognize it; but all progressive ideas must be infused into the common mind by the most insensible degrees; and those who *see* and *know* must be content to cast the seed upon the winds, and let it find root and flourish where and when it may.

In establishing such principles and throwing out from her creed so much that is usually deemed sacred, Naomi found herself obliged to deny the infallibility of the Bible; not with any irreverence, though, for she deemed the Gospels truly Godlike in their general spirit, and found in the Old Testament many passages of inspiration; but she plainly saw that in all times and among all people every religion has had its origin in the human soul. Why, then, should she set before the instincts of the divinity within her the teachings of a remote and less enlightened age? Was it conceivable that spiritual truth, to its fullest extent, had been revealed to man then, and that inspiration had for ever died out of the world, so that the loftiest future of the race is the eternal study of the ancient law? Are there —can there be any bounds to spiritual knowledge? Is it not as illimitable as the soul? And are not those who think otherwise like children who imagine that with a few steps they can touch the horizon? No; the true mission of the Bible is not to serve as a clog upon the onward tendencies of humanity, but to show us by the example of the two great legislators of the world, Moses in the old, and the blessed Nazarene in the new era, each standing alone in the midst of his nation, that it is not

majorities who discover truth, but great master-spirits, so far in advance of their age that in their generation they are but vaguely comprehended. Every century produces thinkers, inspired to a greater or less extent; none that can take their place beside the holy martyr of Calvary, but yet guides upon our way. Inspiration is only a keen perception of the Just, the True, the Beautiful—only a ray of God's light streaming through the darkness of the world.

And yet, with all our pondering, all our harassing struggles with the hidden, there are in life an infinitude of things that we can in no sense understand or reconcile with any opinions we may hold. Naomi felt this; but she brought the doubts, and fears, and anguish of her secret heart, and left them humbly at the feet of Divinity, walking along her way with upturned eyes, and trusting that in the mysterious *Beyond* we shall see more clearly, shall be wiser, better, more faithful to ourselves.

CHAPTER VI.

NAOMI became the rage at Paris, not only as a cantatrice, but in the highest circles of society, in which her curiosity to see something of brilliant Paris life led her to mingle more than was her wont; and everywhere her original beauty, her unpretentious intellect, and the noble simplicity of her manner, created a sensation. Apart from this society, in which she moved more as a spectator than as an actor, she had, as usual, her more immediate circle of friends, chosen from among literary men and artists of distinction, with whom, in the freedom of intellectual abandon, she found her highest pleasure.

Shortly after her return from London she hired a small country-house in the environs of Paris; a lovely little place, already furnished, and surrounded by a garden, and took up her residence there. It was something of a drive to and from the Opera-House, but it was all the more delightful for that. What tranquil pleasure, in beautiful nights of May and June, to roll along, reclining on her cushions, by the glorious moonlight, or the dimmer but not less poetical radiance of numberless stars! And then she was never alone on her return, two or three friends always accompanying her to sup, and enlivening her fatigue by their gaiety. She was on her way home thus one night, talking animatedly, when one of her companions, a gentleman for whose mind and character she had great esteem, said suddenly:

"By-the-by, Madame Castadini, have you ever happened to meet in society a Cuban gentleman by the name of Ameno?"

Naomi reflected for a moment. No; not that she remembered.

"Ah! then you have never met him, for he is not a person that, once seen, would be easily forgotten. I do not know whe-

ther he is literary or not, but he certainly has the capabilities for being so, for he has rare intellectual power. He has seen you night after night, and wants to know you, and I have promised to ask your leave to present him. He belongs to the first society, and is, in short, a person with whom I think you would be pleased."

"Since he is your friend, Monsieur Gustave, and it is you who wish to present him, I shall be happy to receive him. Bring him any morning before I start for rehearsal."

Two or three days had passed, and Naomi, who in the multitude of things that engaged her attention, had forgotten her engagement, was getting into her Berlin in the morning, when she saw a head suddenly project from a carriage rapidly approaching, and a moment after a hat vehemently waved up and down to attract her attention. Recognizing M. Gustave, she stopped short and laughingly returned the salutation. When the carriage drew up before her door, M. Gustave leaped out, and, approaching her, said:

"We are late, Madame. Be unpitying; inflict on us the very worst of all possible punishments—send us away without a word."

"O, no, I shall not," she returned; "it was I who was starting before my time. I have still a few minutes to spare, and afterwards, if you return to the city, I can offer you a seat in my carriage."

A gentleman had alighted meanwhile, with a little less precipitation than M. Gustave, and the latter, turning towards him, now presented him to Naomi as Señor Ameno. Naomi bowed, and preceded the gentlemen into the parlor of her house.

"Señor Ameno speaks French with perfect fluency, Madame," M. Gustave said, when they were seated. "I mention this because I know not if you are acquainted with Spanish."

"My father was a Cuban," Naomi answered, with a gleaming light in her eyes, "and Spanish was the first language I ever learned; but we will speak French, M. Gustave, if you—"

"O, no, no!" he interrupted; "speak Spanish, I beg. I know it tolerably well, and am an enthusiast for its beauty."

"I have availed myself of your most gracious permission, Señora," Señor Ameno said, in his own harmonious tongue, "to come and view a little nearer the siren that has entranced me for so many hours; but indeed I did not expect to find that, in addition to her many other charms, she possessed for me the very great one of almost belonging to my own land."

Naomi bowed slightly in recognition of the compliment, and made some brief remark, just sufficient to enable him to continue the conversation. She who was generally so voluble in expressing her thoughts and opinions, found herself oppressed by a new and inexplicable sense of constraint. This might have been the effect of Señor Ameno's rather peculiar manner, which, though perfectly elegant, was marked by a kind of heroic imperiousness, admirably in keeping with the haughty and noble expression of his face. He conversed with an ease, grace, and brilliancy which Naomi had never heard equalled, and which, though rather apt to produce the impression of egotism, was yet exceedingly charming. Naomi listened like a pleased child to the language of her infancy spoken with such elegant correctness, and it was not until some time after the appointed hour to attend rehearsal that she recollected herself, and rising, renewed her invitation to the gentlemen to take a seat in her carriage. Her polite offer was accepted with pleasure, and they were soon whirling rapidly towards Paris.

Naomi was not one of those, found even among the most well-bred, who scrutinize every line of one's face and form. She was content at first with the general impression she involuntarily received. Thus, for instance, without having examined Señor Ameno's features, she was struck with the statuesque beauty of his countenance, where a very perceptible expression of arrogance added for her an inexplicable kind of charm. She noticed, too, with a sense of satisfaction, the high-bred yet manly grace of his movements and gestures. She spoke but

little during the drive, surrendering the conversation to the gentlemen, who chatted gaily until they arrived at the theatre. There Señor Ameno begged permission to call again, which was smilingly granted him, and they separated.

The artistes noticed that the Prima Donna was somewhat pre-occupied during the rehearsal, though she herself was entirely unconscious of any such thing. Without being aware of it, she was recalling certain witty expressions and droll ideas expressed by Señor Ameno, which had amused her by their originality. The preparations for the evening performance, however, soon distracted her attention, and she certainly had not given this gentleman a conscious thought, when he came two or three days after to sup with her. He was as brilliant as the first day, and kept the table in continual animation. Naomi, too, was gay, though, owing to some unaccountable cause, she found it impossible to address her conversation directly to Señor Ameno without being instantly tongue-tied by a sudden sense of constraint; and the strangest part of this was that it did not cause her any astonishment, and it never occurred to her to query with herself as to the reason of this singularity. One might have thought that the gentleman participated in the feeling, for, though speaking of subjects that interested her, and evidently courting the expression of her opinion, yet he rarely ever glanced at her, and never undisguisedly directed his remarks at her. Naomi could only explain this by attributing it to a want of due consideration for her intellectuality, and she was so accustomed to queen it everywhere that it produced a feeling of pique and irritation, which she, however, was sufficiently mistress of herself to dissemble. "He absolutely acts," she thought, after her guests had gone, "as if it were too great a condescension for him to converse with me. And yet if I am distasteful to him, why does he come here?" She mused on this a long time before going to rest, her pride more galled by a trifle so impalpable that it could not be well defined, than it had ever been by the thousand real annoyances of an artiste's life.

There was a matinée the next morning. The opera was La Favorita, and the house was crowded. It was on Naomi's second entrée that she, who rarely ever noticed anything disconnected with her *rôle*, saw Señor Ameno enter his box in company with a party of people, and take his place beside a beautiful and exquisitely dressed girl. Naomi saw this with one lightning-glance, for, conscientiously averse to having her attention distracted from the business of the opera, she turned away her eyes and resolutely refused to look again.

On her way to her carriage, after the matinée was over, she met M. Gustave, who joined her, and walked by her side chatting about the fine house, etc.

"Pray tell me," Naomi said suddenly, "who were those people in Señor Ameno's box?"

"Was there among them a lovely young girl?"

"Yes, with dark hair and eyes, evidently a Cuban."

"Ah! that is, according to rumor, Ameno's betrothed; the others were probably her parents. She is some kind of a distant relative of his, I believe. Her name is Silva. They are going to travel two years in Europe, and then return to Cuba and be married. By-the-by, how do you like Ameno?"

"He is a very brilliant man," she answered, in a tone more resembling dislike than indifference; "but he seems to be despotic and egotistical."

"Do you think so? Well, I acknowledge that he is haughty, but yet he has a noble heart. As to his intellect, his enthusiastic admiration of you speaks enough for that."

Naomi smiled, but the smile was quietly disdainful, and there was a cold, hard look in her eyes. She got into her carriage, bade M. Gustave "Good morning," and telling the coachman "home" in a short voice, she leaned back on the soft crimson cushions and lowered her veil. A sudden and altogether inexplicable feeling of self depreciation had fallen over her. She

was disgusted with herself, with her profession, and surroundings; and after the Berlin had rolled on for a few rods, she ordered the coachman to stop, put up the cover, and drive *fast.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE Silvas resided in the Rue St. Honoré, in the house of a Cuban friend established permanently in Paris. Ameno lived with them on the terms of intimacy which his relation to Lola rendered perfectly natural and proper. The families were distantly connected, and always on the most friendly terms, and Justo had known Lola from her infancy, had watched her gradually emerge from graceful, promising childhood into girlhood radiant with beauty and happiness; had seen her eyes rest on him with an expression of tenderness no one else had power to call up; and when he found that it was the ardent wish of both families that he should espouse her, it was no wonder that he should consider himself a very happy man in the possession of so much youth, loveliness, and love. He was too enthusiastic an admirer of beauty to be uninfluenced by this potent spell in Lola, and he had too much sensibility not to be moved with gratitude by her love, given to him with such entireness that it took from her all the coquetry natural to her age; yet with all, Justo did not *love* Lola; and the very best proof of this was that he was able to adduce the most satisfactory reasons for his affection for her, whereas Love will set before you every imaginable reason for *not loving*—tauntingly allow you to perceive your folly to its fullest extent, and then, tormenting and incorrigible imp that he is! haughtily defy you *not to love*.

It is as strange as true, and would seem to prove that in this respect man's nature is intrinsically different from woman's, that men, even when engrossed by a true love, are susceptible of temptation from passing passions; how much more so, then, must a man be in whose heart no such holy feeling keeps guard. Thus Justo, when he first saw Naomi, had been carried away

by her beauty and genius. Her form, which, spite of the rare delicacy of its outlines, breathed a voluptuousness no less inebriating than refined; her face, so chastely spiritual in repose, and yet where, by the force of genius, every passion found its play, bewildered his senses and unsettled his judgment; in a word, inspired him with a violent passion. He was a man of the world, yet with far more heart and honor than men of the world usually possess, and he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that the consequences of this feeling might very possibly be a wrong to Lola; but, argued he, it would not be an unpardonable wrong; for he realized, even in the midst of the ardor of his feelings, that it was merely a fever in his blood, that would have its course and leave him with only the dream-like memory of its delirium.

Justo, like all his race, had a great contempt for artistes apart from their profession. Probably this general prejudice, greatly augmented in them, is owing to the fact that the Spanish stage is less elevated than any other; and he had little or no confidence in the *possibility* of an artiste's virtue. In the case in point there came, in confirmation of his opinion, the thousand contradictory reports that were in circulation in society with regard to Naomi. Some, and perhaps the larger part, were inclined to believe that she was a woman of spotless life; others, again, asserted that she had been heard to publicly express the most radical opinions of social questions, such as a disbelief in the sanctity of the marriage relation, the wish for a more independent position for woman, etc.; and taking this in conjunction with her free way of life, they had naturally deduced that it was impossible for a young, beautiful woman to preserve herself pure in the midst of the innumerable temptations that beset her at every step. Justo thought the same, and it was therefore without any compunction of conscience that he made up his mind to investigate and decide the matter for himself.

Two days had elapsed; Naomi was alone in the morning in a little room, half boudoir half library, where she read, studied,

and in fact passed almost all her disengaged hours. It was an elegant and luxurious little place, furnished with her favorite crimson, and adorned with the paintings and statues that she best loved.

It was ten o'clock. Naomi was reclining, rather listlessly, on a couch, her elbow supported by its arm, her chin resting in the palm of her hand, and her eyes fixed on the summer sky that smiled beyond the open windows. Her face was thoughtful, but not sad. There was less of the calmness of its habitual melancholy, and more of the agitation of some chagrin, positive though perhaps so slight as to be unacknowledged to herself.

Her reverie, of whatever nature it might be, was suddenly interrupted; a servant tapped and announced Señor Ameno. Naomi rose with a slight start, gave a rapid glance at the reflection of herself in a large mirror opposite, and after a moment's hesitation ordered the servant to show the gentleman up.

It would be difficult to tell exactly with what feelings Naomi heard the announcement of his name, and advanced to greet him as he entered. Surprise, pleasure, and an indescribable kind of distrustful dislike were so inextricably blended as to baffle analysis. It would seem, however, that pleasure predominated, for she gave him her hand, and said, in a tone that sounded sincere, that she was glad to see him.

"If I am breaking in upon you at an inopportune hour, Señora," he said, "I pray you to tell me so frankly."

"Not in the least, I assure you," she answered; "on the contrary, you have come fortunately just in time to interrupt a reverie, which is, you know, the idlest of all things."

"Truly yes, but yet sometimes very agreeable; and, after all, when a thing is pleasant why should we examine too closely into its utility, in the general acceptation of the term? What is the utility of anything any further than some pleasurable result is produced for somebody?"

Naomi smiled at the whimsical thought, and, finding herself more at ease than she had hitherto been in Justo's presence, entered with spirit into the conversation. They spoke of Cuba, and she was delighted to learn that he was in secret an ardent patriot.

"At home I do not express my opinions with this freedom," he said, "because it would only compromise me and my family, without being of the slightest real benefit to my country. There is not yet sufficient unanimity of sentiment among the Cubans; but the day that Cuba be in good earnest revolutionized, that day will see me fighting for her independence, asking no prouder, happier fate than to sacrifice my life in her cause."

Naomi's eyes kindled:

"Do you remember the lines of your own sublime Heredia:

"Vale mas á la espada enemiga
presentar el impávido pecho,
que yacer de dolor en un lecho,
y mil muertes muriendo sufrir.
Que la gloria en las lides anima
el ardor del patriota constante,
y circunda con halo brillante
de su muerte el momento feliz."

Justo sighed, and as though the subject were painful to him, rather abruptly changed the conversation, which flowed on for an hour in a brilliant, uninterrupted stream. When he took leave, he found with astonishment that the time had flown away delightfully, without his having for a moment thought of uttering a word of gallantry. During the entire day he found it impossible to banish Naomi from his thought; her image floated before him, her voice rang in his ears, and again and again he mused upon the import of every word she had uttered.

Naomi, left alone, pulled the bell, ordered the carriage, and

repairing to her dressing-room, commenced her toilet. She felt impelled by a new and irresistible force to continuous movement. What thoughts were busy in her brain! What complication of undefined feelings striving at her heart!

CHAPTER VIII.

HAD adulation so spoiled you, Naomi, that you could find no pleasure in the society of a man whose assiduous visits proved that you were held in high esteem, but yet whose lips never breathed one word to indicate aught beyond the simplest friendship? If not, why was it that at times you almost hated him?

And you, Justo, what had become of the boldness of the man of the world? Why were you pale and tremulous in Naomi's presence? And why did you speak of everything in existence except the one theme that occupied all your thoughts? Ah! there was a wondrous revolution here. From an everyday passion Justo had passed insensibly into a higher atmosphere, where, it is true, passion exists in all its intensity, but passion purified, idealized, until, as a German critic beautifully says of Romeo and Juliet, "sense itself becomes soul." Yes, Justo *loved* Naomi.

And here commenced the great struggle of his life—a struggle between love, duty, and pride—all the more torturing because it was entirely interior and unshared. He was bound to Lola by every tie of honor and gratitude; could he break away—blighting in its sweetest spring her fresh, budding existence? And then, again, what could Naomi be to him? Should he strive to take her from her untrammelled position, where she was courted and honored, to place her where she would meet alone the supercilious smiles and cold recognitions of those who in their shallowness felt themselves immeasurably her superiors? How could he outrage the prejudices of his family and race—in fact his own?

Borne away by his feelings to such an extent that he was

unable to fly her presence, he yet had sufficient self-control to impose silence upon their expression; and he was the more strongly urged to this inasmuch as, spite of the self-love which continued success had engendered in him, he was extremely doubtful of Naomi's love. It was no longer question of a caprice—a liaison lightly entered into and as lightly quitted—but a great, serious, soul-moving sentiment, which, terminate as it might, could not but leave ineffaceable traces upon his heart.

They were sitting alone one morning. The conversation had taken a philosophical turn, and, passing from one subject to another, they came at last to speak of marriage. Justo took advantage of the opportunity to see if Naomi's opinions were as peculiar as represented.

"Among you Protestants," he said, "divorce is admitted; that is, divorce with the right to marry again. Do you believe in this?"

"Do you think it wiser," Naomi answered, with a quiet, sad smile, "to separate, yet still remain bound? Do you find any utility in this outward bond, which means nothing when it ceases to symbolize the spiritual one that constitutes the only true union?"

"But we believe that marriage is a sacrament, a union consecrated before God by one of his ministers, and consequently indissoluble."

"In my opinion the consecration of marriage is the sentiment that hallows—not the ritual performed by a mortal as fallible as ourselves. And then what does your sacrament amount to? It is not so solemn and inviolable that it cannot be done away with *in fact;* for, after a separation, what remains of it? Nothing, except the theory of a fidelity which I am inclined to think is in the majority of cases very poorly carried out."

"Admitting that marriage ought to be dissoluble, your system is still but little less imperfect than ours, for there are a thousand things that might induce people to desire divorce, that do not come within the jurisdiction of the law."

"Doubtless. People are afraid of innovations, and move step by step, like children feeling their way in the dark. It is well so. I will tell you honestly that in the abstract I am of Shelley's opinion, and do not believe in the necessity of any outward arbitrary bond in the union of the sexes. When two love there needs no force to keep them together; and to remain in such relations without love is a violation of the eternal principle of right. This opinion of mine, rather too frankly expressed, has, no doubt, laid me open to a great deal of misconstruction. I do not care for that, in general, but I wish *you* to understand me rightly. This is only an *abstract opinion.* I know well that no such theory can be practised in our time. Humanity must understand itself better, have more faith in itself, before it can be submitted to the working of its own inherent laws. Above all, women must have more resources for pecuniary independence. I don't mean that they should be independent in marriage; that is, I think, incompatible with their special mission; but simply that they should not be forced by want, as they so often are in our social system, to enter into distasteful relations, or else subject themselves to a life of labor so little remunerative as to render existence a penance. Without this, freedom of divorce, far from being an advantage to women, would be their greatest curse; for they would then inevitably become mere articles of merchandise, handed about from one owner to another. Don't think me dogmatical, but I really do believe that in the question of the true relation of the sexes, it is women who must give the law. Their instincts, in this particular at least, are purer, truer than men's, and their faith far more abiding."

"Ah, Señora, the world will never be pure enough for the realization of such a Utopia! Society would be in a constant state of anarchy; there could be nothing stable. Men and women once set free, would be borne away by every new caprice, which they might magnify into a sentiment."

"You forget that all laws have their origin in ourselves. Do

you think it less easy, less a point of honor and conscience, to be faithful to ourselves—faithful to the law of God within us—than to obey harsh, arbitrary codes, originated in an age of greater ignorance?"

"You argue ably, I admit. It is not at all dangerous for a woman like you to have such opinions. But take two people without your intellect and will, bound by ties which you grant should be respected, at least as a matter of expediency; let them meet others more congenial to them, love, and think as you do, and what would be the consequence?"

"The consequence, I imagine, would be the same with the majority of people, whatever their opinions might be. For myself, I conceive the *sentiment* of love to be infinitely superior to its passion; and I can form no idea of the possibility of desiring aught that be not for the highest good of the one beloved."

Justo sat in silence for several minutes. Without any very earnest convictions on these subjects, he was naturally of enlarged and liberal views, and was forced to acknowledge to himself the force and justice of Naomi's reasoning. With some new power of perception he comprehended for the first time all the elevation of a nature which, separated by want of faith from the guidance of the conventions that rule the world, was pure and strong enough to be an inviolate commandment to itself. His love, augmented a thousand fold by his increased esteem, throbbed at his heart with mighty power, urging him with an impulse almost irresistible to fall at her feet, casting every opposing consideration to the winds, and tell her how madly, and yet how reverentially she was loved. Bewildered, thrown entirely from his balance by the fierce contention of his vehement emotions, he rose, and stood holding in his the hand she had extended to take leave. It was one of those palpitating instants in which time seems to us to stand still and wait breathlessly for the decision of our destiny. Naomi had left her hand in his full a minute before she was aware

of it; then, with burning cheek and downcast eyes, she drew it hastily away. The smallest possible point of time more, and the flood of passion would have overflowed his lips, but her sudden movement dashed back upon his heart the raging passion-wave. Another minute and he had entered his tilbury, and was driving headlong towards Paris.

CHAPTER IX

DAY was fast merging into night, and the mysterious shadows of the hour so wrapt the Silvas' drawing-room that at first sight it appeared untenanted, though on a sofa, in one of the furthest corners of the room, robed in her light, flowing drapery, reclined the form of Lola Silva, her fair, young head drooping languidly and her face half buried in a cushion, already saturated with the tears that still fell fast and warm from her eyes. She knew not how long she had been there, forgetful or heedless of everything save the pain within. She lay moaning like a grieved child, as in truth she was.

For weeks her jealous suspicions had been aroused by Justo's frequent absence and continual pre-occupation of mind. She had tried to question him, but he had skilfully evaded answering; had gently reproached him, and he had seemed not to hear. At last, unable any longer to endure the torture of suspense, she employed a young and agile slave of her father to secretly follow him, and ascertain what or who it was that thus lured him from her side. The answer was brought back that the young master went almost every day to the residence of La Castadini. Lola had barely strength enough to hear this with apparent calmness, and then she had fled to hide the anguish of her soul in solitude.

Purposeless, nerveless, conscious only of suffering, she still lay there, when the door suddenly opened and Justo entered. Closing the door behind him, he traversed the apartment with agitated steps, without observing Lola, and sank as if exhausted into a fauteuil by one of the windows. He had quitted Naomi that morning with a reeling brain and a heart swollen to suffocation; and all the rest of the

day, go where he might, strive as he might to fly from the thought, he had repeated to himself incessantly, with all the delirium of ardent passion: "I love her! I love her! I love her with every thought of my soul, with every pulse of my being! Oh, to say adieu to her in that cold way, when I so longed to snatch her to my heart! To pass only a cold, ceremonious hour with her, when I could wish to live and die by her side!"

Lola had recognized his step in the hall, and when the door opened, eagerly raised her head; but seeing him pass to a seat with his entirely abstracted air, she uttered a low sob, and burst into a fresh passion of tears. At her stifled exclamation, Justo raised his head, and his eyes wandered anxiously around the darkened room till he caught sight of her; then he rose with a start, and hastily approaching, said, with that almost womanly tenderness which contrasted so beautifully with the haughtiness of his nature:

"Lola, dear! alone, and in darkness! Are you ill?"

"No," she answered, trying to steady her voice, and averting her pale, tear-stained face; "I am a little nervous and sad, that is all."

"Rouse yourself, dear. See, it is already time to dress for the opera. This is the last night of Ernani, and it would never do to miss it—to fail to hear, perhaps for the last time, the—" he hesitated; the very mention of *her* name oppressed his heart; and he added, in a trembling voice: "all the fine artistes of this troupe."

"I do not care to go," she said falteringly.

"It will do you good; you will feel immeasurably better. Come, Lola, as a favor to me?"

Too gentle to resist entreaties, and especially from Justo, she yielded, rose, and, encircled by Justo's arm, walked to the door; there she paused an instant, as if expecting some little mark of love from him, but it came not. How could he, loyal nature, feign passion here, when heart and

brain were teeming with the wildest love for another. He gently pressed her hand, and thus suffered her to go. An hour after, he, Lola, and Mrs. Silva were in their box at the opera-house.

CHAPTER X.

From the moment of parting with Justo in the morning, an unaccountable weight had fallen over Naomi. The presage of some impending sorrow seemed to lie heavy at her heart; and it was with listless steps, and frequent and long sighs, that she prepared herself for the evening's performance. She could not, as usual, identify herself with her *rôle;* time dragged wearily, and she was relieved and glad when it was all over. Desiring above all things quietude and rest, and therefore anxious to avoid all encounter with friends, she hurriedly assumed her own attire, and stole unobserved to her carriage. M. Gustave and some other friends reached the spot in search of her some ten minutes after she had left Paris behind.

At home, Naomi found the supper table set in her little parlor, to the left of the hall, a refreshing breeze blowing in the long, open windows from the garden, and the light of the chandelier stealing with a soothing softness through its alabaster globes.

Sinking languidly into a fauteuil, she said to the servant:

"Remove these things, lower the light a little more, and then you can go to bed."

She was silently obeyed, and then left alone in one of those moods in which, without being in the least inclined to sleep, one likes to be perfectly at ease; and finding in the lateness of the hour a guarantee of solitude, Naomi slowly unwound the gauze scarf from about her face and neck, unbound her belt, and removing the fastenings from her hair, shook it loosely about her; then, with one arm thrown above her head, over the back of her chair, she sat, still oppressed by an undefined gloom,

gazing dreamily out the window opposite. The wind murmured softly among the bushes planted on either side of the casement, sometimes wafting their fragrant blossoms into the room; and the moon, now and then breaking forth from the clouds that portended rain, sent down showers of light upon their quivering leaves. Suddenly, without the slightest sound of steps or rustling of drapery, a dark figure intercepted the light in the open space left in the centre of the window by the shrubbery. The silence and loneliness of the hour, and this mysteriously gliding form, froze Naomi with a terror new to her; but, naturally brave, she recovered herself in a moment, and bounding to her feet with a suppressed cry, made resolutely two or three steps in advance. At the same instant the figure leaped lightly into the room, and throwing from about it a large, black mantle, revealed to Naomi's astonished eyes the face and form of Lola Silva. She wore her opera dress of silk and lace, and diamonds flashed amid the flowers wreathed in her hair and resting on her bosom. She was as beautiful and as pale, tremulous, and tearful as some poor tempest-shaken flower. She said in Spanish, drawing a step nearer Naomi, with clasped hands and a timid, almost supplicating air:

"Ah! Señora, pardon me—pardon me for coming into your house in this way. I saw your window open to the ground, and that you were here alone, and thought I could enter without being seen by your servants."

Mute and motionless as a statue Naomi stood, with a magnetic perception of the object of this strange visit gnawing fiercely within her.

The young girl's youth, beauty, and grace; the expression of her eyes, half suffused with tears; her deferential manner, and the appealing tones of her voice, ought to have roused every generous instinct of Naomi's magnanimous nature; but far from this, she experienced an aversion that was almost hatred, and which was too bitter to be in the least disguised. She said coldly, drawing herself haughtily up:

"Will you inform me, Señorita, to what I owe the honor of a visit from an entire stranger at this extraordinary hour?"

"You will think me wild—mad. Well, perhaps I am; but I cannot help it. I must speak to you. Justo, Señora, he is mine—his time, his thoughts, his love have been mine ever since I have memory. Oh, do not take him from me! You have fame, and beauty, and unlimited admiration; leave me him—all I ask—all I love!"

"Girl!" Naomi answered, taking a step towards her, with such a look of wrath and scorn on her face, and an air so almost menacing that Lola shrank back in terror, "your lover is nothing to me; but if he were, do you think that I would yield him to your weak tears? *Your love!* What would be the love of a child like you compared to the love of a strong-souled woman, whose heart had matured in suffering? For you there would be forgetfulness of disappointment, and other loves; but such a sentiment would so entwine itself with every fibre of my being, that it could perish only by uprooting that. What! Have you so little pride that you would stoop to beg a heart? I tell you again your lover is nothing to me; but if he *loved me*, and I him, he would be *mine*, *not* yours, and I should take him."

"But you do *not* love him—you have said you do *not* love him," pleaded Lola, a gleam of joy breaking through the grief and fear of her face. "O! thank you, thank you a thousand times for saying that!"

"You need not thank me," Naomi replied, in an unchanged tone; "I want no gratitude to which I have no title. I make no sacrifice for you—and I would make none."

A wonderful contrast those two women presented—Lola bending almost supplicant and more tremulous with happiness now than she had been with anguish a few minutes before, and Naomi erect, haughty, unrelenting as death.

There was a momentary silence. Lola picked up her mantle, and winding it about her, again and with uncertain steps drew near Naomi.

"Señora," she said, "I know that I have shocked, offended, insulted you, by coming to your house in such a way and at such an hour. It was a delirium—truly, truly, I hardly knew what I was doing. If you have ever loved, and feared to see the loved one wrested from you, you can understand what I have suffered to-day, and pity and pardon me. Can you not? Will you not?" and she held out her little trembling hand. But Naomi, lividly pale, recoiled from her touch.

"Señorita Silva," she said, in a voice so full of scorn that but for its inseparable melody, it would have been harsh, "let me tell you that *I* might suffer, might die, but there could be no agony great enough to induce me to bare *my* heart to a proud rival's scorn. It is enough; I am weary, and need rest."

With a look of wonder and pain Lola turned, passed swiftly and silently through the room and out the window, and disappeared into the darkness.

Like a wild storm unchained among the mountains, Naomi raged up and down her room for hours, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, her dark hair floating in the night breeze. Outraged in her pride, where she was so keenly alive to a wound, tortured by a new and uncomprehended pain, could her rash, desperate will have worked its wish that night, she would have spurned Lola from her path as something she loathed too much to touch, and have hurled Justo and herself into the blackness of annihilation.

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE Lola's carriage, whirling along at a tremendous pace, brought her in a few moments to her own door. A solitary light gleamed in the façade of the house, and she saw with a rapid glance, as she alighted, that it shone in Justo's room. She pressed a doubloon into the coachman's hand, with a meaning glance and laying her finger on her lip. The negro bowed, and with a significant gesture indicated that she was understood and would be obeyed; and Lola, entering the house and ascending the stairs, paused breathless and with a wildly beating heart at Justo's door. For an instant she hesitated, restrained by timidity and maiden shame, but the strength of her impulse conquered, and she tapped gently. His voice, in that low, monotonous tone so eloquent of heart-sadness, bade her "come in." She obeyed, and for the first time crossed the threshold of her betrothed's apartment.

It was the largest of the three rooms that formed his suite, and was used by him as a study and reception-room. It was elegantly furnished, but without luxury. There were some fine paintings on the walls, and the light fell from a chandelier of rare workmanship upon a table covered with books and papers, beside which Justo was seated, his back towards the door, his elbow resting on the table, and his head pensively bowed upon his hand.

Lola hesitatingly advanced, but he did not move or turn; and in a voice so low and quivering that it was almost inaudible, she said:

"Justo!"

He fairly bounded from his chair, turning upon her a face of the blankest amazement.

"Lola! Why, what in the name of Heaven are you doing here—and in that dress? Your satin slippers are stained and covered with dust; where have you been?"

He asked the question, but he had already read the truth in her agitated face and disordered dress, in the cold, trembling hands she laid in his, bending her head over them and bursting into a passion of tears.

"Where should I have been," she murmured through her sobs, "but to the house of the woman who is luring you from me?"

"La Castadini, Lola? It cannot be! What to do? What to say? To what purpose?"

"To find out for myself how matters were; to tell her that you were mine. O! Justo, you will see her no more; the proud, insolent woman, how she talked to your Lola, as if she and not I had been the superior—telling me that if you loved her, and you were aught to her, you would be hers, not mine, and she should take you from me."

His pale face flushed, and a vivid gleam shot from his eyes.

"Did she say that, Lola? Did she say that?"

"She said," continued Lola, hurriedly, seeing with a woman's quickness the mistake she had made, "that you were *nothing* to her; and she said it as proudly and disdainfully as a queen. Justo, I know that you love *me;* it was only caprice that was leading you away from me. But have you the right, are you willing, to pain me, your Lola, your betrothed, for such a woman as La Castadini?"

With a darkening face, and almost pushing her from him, he said, haughtily:

"La Castadini is the purest woman that I have ever known. What right have you to asperse the character of an innocent woman?"

"I care not what she is! Let her be what she may, only promise me, Justo, that you will see her no more. It rests with you, for she has said again and again that you are *nothing* to her."

He held her off at arm's length; his breath came pantingly, and he murmured, in a broken voice:

"Lola, do not ask me *that!*"

"I must ask it, and you must grant it to me. Look at me, Justo! Am I not the same Lola that you once so loved? Will you sacrifice my happiness, perhaps my life, to a passing fancy for a woman who cares no more for you than for any other of her thousand admirers?"

Proud, strong man as he was, his pride and strength were fiercely shaken by the conflict within. He did not care to hide it, and he could not have done it had he wished. There was perfect silence for at least five minutes. Lola still stood drooping before him, and he could feel her tears fall fast and warm upon his hands. Nevertheless, who shall say, love is such a mighty ruler? possibly the recollection of Naomi's words, which Lola had astutely persisted in repeating, weighed more in determining him than the consideration of duty. Gradually his brow relaxed, and his curved and haughty mouth assumed the firm lines that indicate a fixed resolve. Gently encircling her waist and drawing her to him, he raised her head, and said, looking her steadily in the eyes:

"Lola, I promise. I will see her no more."

"Justo! *my* Justo! *Mine only* once more!" and with a great burst of joyous emotion she laid her head upon his bosom.

With eyes fixed on vacancy, he softly stroked her hair, as if to soothe a grieved child, pondering on the unrealizable import of those words: *he would see her* NO MORE!

"Lola," he said at length, "the clock points to three. Imagine what the consequences would be if by any chance my valet should come, or your voice should be recognized here in my room at this hour. Let me beg you to retire at once. Forget all that has happened to-night, and rely on my promise."

Smiling, though still agitated, and blushing at his words, she suffered him to lead her to the door, received upon her brow his calm, almost fraternal kiss—and was gone.

When the door closed after her, he bowed his face in his hands, a low groan burst from his oppressed heart, and he murmured, passionately:

"Naomi! oh, Naomi!"

CHAPTER XII.

She, Naomi, who had never been approached by men of any appreciation without receiving the tribute of their homage; she, to have tamely permitted the repeated visits of a man who, plighted to another, could have no other interest than to study with the curiosity of intellect a woman who, his rapid perceptions taught him, stood apart from her sex; she to have been taken to task by his girl-love, and beneath her own roof! When the tempest in her soul had to some degree subsided, her proud indignation still remained; and she found consolation only in the thought that at least it was all over now.

If we ever, in the whirl of violent emotion, stopped to analyze what we feel; if passion, in the intensity of its sway, did not so completely blind us to everything but itself, Naomi, usually so severely just in her sentiments, might have paused and looked with astonishment at the exaggeration and injustice of her present feelings. In sober truth, what had there been to rouse her thus? Justo had solicited permission to visit her, and it had been accorded him. He had treated her ever with the most profound respect, speaking always of general or philosophical subjects, of which she loved to converse; and, knowing his engagement to another, she could but honor the delicacy which prohibited his uttering a word of gallantry to her. Again, what marvel that Lola, the impetuous young creole, should misunderstand these frequent visits, and suffer herself to be borne away by a jealous impulse? Naomi, her senior in years, and so immeasurably in advance of her in experience, should have regarded her childishness with the kind, pitying smile of superior wisdom—not with this galled, chafing heart, this burning thirst after something she herself knew not what.

Two days had passed when Naomi entered the opera-house to sing La Traviata for the last time that season. On stepping on the stage, involuntarily, as was indeed her unconscious custom, her eyes sought Justo's box. The silken curtains were drawn very far back and looped, and Naomi saw with a sudden chill that it was entirely empty—that box where, for so many weeks, without the intermission of a single night, she had seen Justo's face kindle with enthusiastic admiration, the only applause he ever rendered her; and from which, at the end of the last act, a bunch of rare flowers, tied up seemingly with his own hand, had been thrown at her feet. Those flowers! she had placed them in vases apart from others, it was true, but she had seen them die unheedingly, unconscious that they were of more value to her than any other of her innumerable trophies of triumph; but on her return home that night she sought her boudoir, and there, in a little vase of crystal and gold, she found his last offering, somewhat paled but still beautiful. She sat down beside the table where it stood, leaning her head upon her hand, and contemplated it for a long while. The exquisite perfumed blossoms, culled evidently with infinite pains and carefully bound together with a ribbon, looked *almost* as though they might have been chosen *emblematically*. Emblematically! Of what? She dismissed the absurd idea with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, but she tended the flowers day after day to prolong their life, and when at last they had neither color nor perfume, she laid them gently, almost tenderly away.

It was after the lapse of some few days, when indignation had died away and a sorrowful calm succeeded, that from the depths of Naomi's soul an awful sense of desolation welled up and spread itself like a vast, lowering cloud over all the face of existence. It came stealing along so insensibly that she was not aware of it until it was upon her in all its intensity; and then, with all her power of self-analysis, she was mazed and baffled by the development of a feeling which, undreamed of till now, suddenly asserted itself with irresistible might. There

is a tale somewhere of an alchymist who found the wondrous stone, but knew not that he had held it in his grasp till it had gone from him again for ever; and this might serve to illustrate Naomi's feelings when, as by a flash of revelation, she comprehended all she had unknowingly possessed in her brief, strange intercourse with Justo Ameno. She, who had seen him time and time again recognizing in herself nothing particular beyond the constraint with which he had always inspired her, not sure even that she *liked* him, now stood aghast at the contemplation of life reft of his presence, his voice, his full, penetrating gaze. Naomi was no willing self-deceiver. Ungrateful as the task might be, she never shrank from looking realities steadily in the face; and argue and marvel as she might, she was constrained to yield before the incontestable fact that every aspiration of her soul, every passionate impulse of her heart which had only gathered strength in its long repression, centred in the individuality of this man. Neither could this be a delusion, for these, with the experience of twenty-five years, are rare; and again it was precisely in absence—absence, the destroyer of illusions and the infallible test of the nature and truth of all sentiments, that this love had declared itself.

Taking into account the modifications of character produced by the difference of education and circumstances, there was a wondrous affinity between these two beings, and Naomi commenced to be indistinctly conscious of this. She recalled now the strong, proud, fierce points of his nature, which had once inspired her with a kind of rebellious aversion, with adoring admiration; for the storm, the whirlwind, the cataract, all that is terrifically sublime in nature, captivated her poetic imagination; and it is in these ardent, and at times ungovernable characters, that the most immense capacities for tenderness and devotion are found; as, in the physical world, it is the same wind that, raging in the furious blast, uproots trees and lashes the ocean to fury, and sighs through the orange grove, or gently caresses the frail flowers.

Naomi lived over again, in thought, every hour she had ever passed near Justo, calling up with all the avidity of her aroused heart the words, and tones, and looks of those interviews, and striving to wrest from little things, which at the time had escaped her as nothings, some indication of covert tenderness. Then giddy and faint with the emotion it awakened, she remembered their last interview, the thrill of unacknowledged yet ineffable pleasure with which she had found him near her, felt his breath upon her cheek, and trembled beneath his burning glance. O! it seemed to her now, in recalling that moment of most eloquent silence, while he had held her hand in his, that the very atmosphere about them magnetically breathed of passion. Had it been only an illusion born of the ardor of her own feelings? Strangely there grew up within her a hope—to her reason an unwarranted and insensate hope—that she was loved, and that he would come and tell her so with his dear lips once, *only once*—it was all she craved, all the felicity she dared to ask of Heaven.

No word of her husband's death had ever reached her, and she had, therefore, no right to believe herself free from the conventional bonds that forbade her contracting any other *lawful* alliance. Recognizing in herself that entire abandonment of her own will to that of another, which is the inseparable accompaniment of perfect love; unable to form any conception of the possibility of resisting any wish of Justo; knowing that had he said to her: "Naomi, I love you—I will leave all for you—be mine!" the answer would have sprung to her lips as spontaneously as breath: "My home is by your side—I have no other in all the universe—there is nothing that I could do for you that would be a sacrifice—*I belong to you, wholly and solely*—dispose of me—yet, with all, she never in her wildest reveries dreamed of being granted such supreme bliss. She prayed with most earnest, most inexpressible longing to know that she was loved, *that was all.* He was bound to another; well, she would strive to forget that. Let the distance of the poles divide them.

She would go upon her way solitary, but not alone—full of the thought of him, sustained and comforted by the immortal memory of the one rapturous hour in which she had palpitated in his arms, and heard from his lips the divine words: "I love you!" Upon her path, however far removed from his, would be his watching eyes; at every casual mention of her name his heart would secretly throb, and at the mysterious twilight hour, which they both so loved, they would steal apart from all the world, and send their thoughts through space in search of each other.

The operatic season closed, and she was relieved and glad. For nights the only real thing to her had been that empty box, mocking her like a phantom of lost and unappreciated joy. She was glad, too, when the increasing heat sent people pleasure-seeking out of Paris, and delivered her from the necessity of entertaining and trying to converse and appear amused, when everything looked to her as blank and soulless as the painted figures of a show.

Justo, she knew, was still in Paris, but she never met him; though with the vague, unconfessed hope that she might, she took many long walks and drives. Then arose the bitter reflection that even should they encounter each other, a formal salutation would be the most their acquaintance authorized, and this cruel incongruity of their actual relations, and her hidden feelings, goaded her with a sense of wrong and injury.

After an absence of some hours from home, with what a beating heart would she return; with what eager, trembling hands turn over letters and cards, and interrogate the bouquets sent, some anonymously, some with names attached! Alas! she always finished with the sinking heart, the pale brow, the long-drawn, exhausted sigh of a disappointment ever new, and ever increasing in bitterness.

And so clinging tenaciously to that hope, as dim and distant as the farthest star that sends its feeble ray through space, the time wore on, wore on—oh! how wearily!

CHAPTER XIII.

It is near midnight. Angelo is alone in his studio, lighted only by the radiance of a glorious summer moon that, streaming in through the curtainless windows, falls with a weird effect upon the still, white forms that people the room. The young sculptor sits upon a bench in front of the statue of Sappho; his hat lies negligently at his feet as if he had just entered from the street; and his listless attitude and fixed gaze indicate the profound abstraction of his thoughts. His right hand rests on an open letter lying on the window-sill, a paragraph of which has given rise to his thoughtful mood; but his mind has wandered from it now, and all his past rises before him like a vast panorama which the eye traverses at one sweep. Coming back, with the shadow of the dark, desperate hours of his life upon him, he takes the letter and reads again the part that has so interested and perplexed him. This it is:—

"Angelo, am I so peculiar as to stand apart from all the rest of the world? Is my destiny to be as exceptional as my nature? I sometimes think that some of us are born to suffer; created expressly to show how much the heart can bear. Dear brother, I would that I were with you! Your hand in mine this day—this hour would be to me an indescribable comfort. Why was I not contented to remain when I was last by your side? I have fame enough, wealth enough; why did I not, then, renounce the stage, and find happiness in watching your growing fame as you have watched mine? But I shall see you in the fall, Angelo, and we shall not meet to part again so soon as we have hitherto."

All the rest of the letter is characterized by Naomi's usual

tender and unselfish tone, but in these few sentences an utter heart-anguish too poignant to be altogether silenced, bursts forth. "What is it? What can it be?" he thinks, as he reads it over and over again, pausing to weigh each word that breathes such bitter pain. "Love? But how should love make her suffer? Who is there that would not be the proudest, the most blessed of mortals at possessing such an inestimable treasure as her heart?" With a long sigh he refolds the letter, and places it in the inner pocket of his coat. Then moved by an irresistible impulse, he falls at the feet of his cold, mute Sappho, and gazes earnestly into her face, as though he would fain read there the secret of her prototype. Alas! the melancholy, ardent poetess looks past him, seeking through space her beloved one. The moonbeams shine upon his long, fair hair, upon his face of almost womanly loveliness, and show the tender light of his dark loving eyes. Presently he gently clasps the statue-face, his burning lips touch with a shudder her pure, cold brow, and two great scalding tears slide suddenly from his eyes and fall upon the upturned face.

CHAPTER XIV.

FALL had come. The Silvas, on the eve of quitting Paris for the continent, had gone to a brilliant reception; and Justo, declining to accompany them on the plea of indisposition, was alone in their drawing-room, pacing the floor with slow steps, his hands clasped behind him, and his head pensively bowed on his breast.

For two months Lola had been supremely happy. Justo had bravely kept his word; he had *not* seen Naomi; had not written to her; had tried, O! with what effort, not to think of her. *Not to think of her!* As well might he have striven with his presumptuous will to stop the current of his blood as to banish from his brain that vital thought; and on the pale brow, in the dim eye, and painful compression of the firm lip, might be read the traces of his vain struggle with that marvellous power which is sweeter than life, and mightier than death.

He had been within reach of her, had breathed the same air, and this had been a sort of poor consolation; but now even this was to be denied. On the morrow he was going to put hours on hours, and miles on miles between them. As the thought crossed his mind for the thousandth time he was seized with an irresistible yearning to look upon her once more, to hear her voice, to speak to her—not mere idle, empty words, but to breathe to her the thoughts that thronged upon him—the feelings that filled his heart to bursting. He did not think with her that this would be happiness enough. Men are rarely sufficiently ideal for such a conception, but it seemed to him that it would, in some degree, alleviate his misery. O! to have those glorious eyes, as spiritual as stars, shine on him once again! To listen to that voice of purest melody! To breathe for one moment

the intoxicating air that surrounded her! He paused suddenly in the agitated walk into which these reflections had hastened him, clasping with both hands his throbbing, burning brow. And Lola, and his promise! "Let it go!" he said, with a furious gesture, as though it were a tangible thing that he could rend to atoms; "to Lola I sacrifice the happiness of my life; it is enough, and I will snatch one moment of joy in the very face of fate!" His tropical blood boiling with the fire within, he caught up his hat, and rapidly descended to the street.

It was a soft, cool September night, moonless, but refulgent with stars; uncalmed by its beauty, forgetful of all save his one absorbing wish, Justo never thought of calling a *fiacre;* for, chafing with this fiery impatience, it would have been impossible for him to sit still, and striking into the street that lay in the direction of Naomi's home, he rushed on.

Twenty minutes' walk brought him in front of her little garden-gate against which he leaned breathless, a cloud floating before his eyes, and the blood surging so tumultuously at his heart that he was scarcely able to sustain himself. Growing more composed after a few moments' rest, he gently opened the gate, and drew near the house. The windows of Naomi's drawing-room were wide open. There was a light within, and the lace curtains, looped back to admit the breeze, offered no obstruction whatever to the view. Precisely as Lola had done, Justo's eyes involuntarily made the sweep of the room, and with one foot on the first step of the porch, he stood transfixed with astonishment, doubtful of his own powers of vision.

Naomi reclined in a large arm-chair, robed in the negligé of indisposition; her face was pale but calm, and her eyes were closed as though she slumbered. Sitting beside, clasping one of her hands, and supporting her head with his arm, sat a young man with long fair hair, and a face of poetic beauty. It was impossible to mistake the expression that lit up his countenance, impossible to mistake the adoring gaze with which he regarded the reposing face before him.

For a minute, which seemed to him an eternity, Justo was conscious only of a wild commotion within, and an insane impulse to precipitate himself through the window and slay them both. Mechanically he felt for the poniard, which he carried in the inner pocket of his coat; but the rectitude of his heart and the clearness of his judgment were as unerring as his passions were vehement, and the temptation passed. What claim had he upon Naomi? What word of love had he ever spoken to her? What fidelity could she owe him? With an almost superhuman effort he tore himself away, turned and fled with reckless, desperate steps, longing only to put the immensity of space between himself and that accursed spot.

Fatality! fatality! O! be forever ignorant, Naomi, that from your very grasp has slipped what you had joyfully offered up your life to win.

The next day, without a word or line of adieu, Justo, in company with the Silvas, left Paris.

CHAPTER XV.

After the reception of Naomi's letter containing the paragraph so inexplicable to him, Angelo had anxiously awaited the arrival of another; but weeks and weeks passed and none came; and prompted by a sudden impulse of unendurable anxiety, he started for Paris. Coming as he did, just in time to place an impassable barrier between Justo and Naomi, did he not seem like a blind instrument of implacable fate?

It was such a joyful surprise to Naomi to see him walk unannounced into her room; so consoling to her wounded and suffering spirit to have him sit at her feet in the old fashion, and question her tenderly, as far as delicacy permitted, as to her health and happiness. She owned frankly that she was not very well; but she evaded all direct replies to the rest. Why think she was not happy? It had been one of her old attacks of melancholy that induced her to write as she did. Would she not be ungrateful to Providence if she were not happy—she who had been prospered beyond her deserts?

"And now that you are here, Angelo, dear," she said, "you will take up your abode with me, and see something of Paris; and when you get tired—"

"When I get tired I shall take you to London with me, Naomi. You know you promised to be there with me in the fall."

"We shall see, Angelo," she said, with a sad, constrained smile.

"Why, have you so fallen in love with Paris that you cannot leave it?"

"It is a very seductive city; we shall see how you pass its ordeal."

The presence of her loved and loving brother stimulated and roused Naomi. She shook off the apathy that for weeks had benumbed her faculties, and went with Angelo everywhere as gay as the gayest.

One night at a musical soirée she met M. Gustave.

"Pray, tell me," he said, in his usual lively way, "did Ameno say anything about me before he left? Do you know to what part of the Continent he is gone?"

Naomi paled slightly; but she answered, with the most unconcerned air imaginable:

"No, M. Gustave, Señor Ameno did not speak to me of you; and I am unable to give you any information as to his whereabouts."

Returned home that night, Naomi and Angelo lingered awhile upon the porch; she plucking roses, and absently strewing the ground with their leaves; he leaning against the door-post, silent and thoughtful.

"Well, Angelo," she said at last, "are you tired of Paris? Are your eyes turning homeward?"

"I miss my statues. This gay, luxurious life is well enough to look at for a little while, but it is not my element. Still, I do not want to go till you be willing to accompany me."

"I will go with you. My preparations can soon be made—are you pleased now?" And she laid her hand caressingly upon his shoulder.

He did not answer immediately; and when he did, his voice was low and not quite steady.

"Very happy, indeed, dear sister. Yes, you had better enter; the air grows cold. Good night!"

A week after, Angelo was at home, and Naomi occupying her old lodgings in London.

CHAPTER XVI.

Rest—rest and forgetfulness. No operatic engagements for the present, bringing with every passionate, soul-stirring aria the memory of *his* looks and gestures. Let her strive to believe that she had never quitted Angelo to return to Paris; that all had been an illusion, which would fade away like a feverish dream. Let her forget that she was a great artiste, with a world-wide reputation, and endeavor to persuade herself that she was a simple, domestic woman, ignorant of the world, living here quietly with an only and beloved brother.

With this resolve she passed day after day in the studio, sometimes sewing, sometimes reading aloud; pertinaciously calling back her wayward, wandering thoughts, and finding that the next instant they had again drifted away.

Preöccupied as she was, it was impossible to be thus constantly with Angelo and not perceive, ere long, that some mysterious influence was working a change in him. A sombre shadow had darkened the old ideality of his face, and his slight tinge of natural melancholy had deepened into gloom. With her book upon her knee, Naomi would sometimes regard him for minutes with wondering, questioning eyes, without his seeming to be in the least aware of it; and if by any chance he met her gaze, a burning flush would spread suddenly over his face, and he would turn away and busy himself in some other part of the room till his emotion had subsided.

With perceptions sharpened by her own recent experience, Naomi did not long remain in doubt. At first a vague, almost incredible inkling of the truth stole into her mind, but every hour's observation confirmed it; and not knowing whether astonishment or pain were uppermost within her, she saw the fact at

last *clearly*. Yet this knowledge was far from producing on her the effect it would have done six months before. Believing that where she had been her truest self, where all her soul had gushed spontaneously forth, she had failed to arouse any but the most commonplace of sentiments, her faith in her own capabilities of inspiring love had received a cruel blow. At his age, she reasoned, and living as he did in isolation, it was very natural that his young heart should seek a vent for itself; and very natural, too, under the circumstances, that he should magnify into love his tender, grateful attachment to herself. Studiously concealing from him that she had divined the secret he so carefully sought to hide, she meditated upon the means of curing him of his illusion.

It was one fair October eve that, sitting by his high studio window, she threw aside her book, and spoke to him, with the unsurpassed grace and eloquence so peculiarly her own when in the vein for conversation, of her travels, and the many persons and places she had seen, till, forgetful of his task, he drew near with his chisel still in his hand, and sat down beside her; his elbow on the window-sill, and his chin in the palm of his hand.

The air had grown a little chill. She wrapped about her the shawl that had fallen from her graceful shoulders, and, with eyes pensively fixed on the subduedly glowing horizon, fell suddenly into silence. He did not speak; but his watching eyes observed, with eager interest, every shade of expression that flitted over her speaking face. Presently, without looking at him, she said:

"I have been thinking a great deal of you lately, Angelo."

"Thinking of me!" He only repeated her words; but what a world of anxious questioning there was in his tone.

"Yes; thinking how strange and how unwise it is that, at twenty years of age, you should make such a hermit of yourself. With your organization, the society of intelligent and refined women would be particularly congenial; then, by-and-by, you

would, in all probability, love, and find a companion. Why! pray don't look so startled. You know I am your sister—your elder sister; therefore, you should think my judgment worth something in this matter. Selfishness would prompt me to keep my good brother all to myself; but we must not be selfish with those we love. Coming here the other morning, I met a young English girl I knew last year at Florence. She left her carriage to come and speak to me, and seemed so joyous at seeing me again. She is a pretty, gentle creature, Angelo. Such a fair and fragile thing, that to paint her an artist would need his softest shades; and yet so bright that she might be touched off with sunbeams. She asked me in her childlike way where I was going, and I spoke to her of you. 'Take me with you there, some day,' she said, laughing; 'I love statues and sculptors.' Would you like to know her, Angelo?"

He turned his face towards the air, and, with a long-suppressed, gasping respiration, grasped his chisel convulsively with both hands, as though he would have broken the solid steel; and yet his tone as he answered, marked as it was by powerful restraint, was perfectly gentle.

"Your friends, you know, Naomi, are always mine;—but don't think of marriage for me, I beg."

"And why not? If, instead of your sister, there were sitting here a loved and loving wife, would you not be happier, Angelo?"

"And you, who so appreciate the charms of such relations, why do you not marry? It seems to me that your remarks are just as applicable to yourself as to me."

"O, I!" she said, with a frozen smile that drew her face into a sudden rigidity. "I marry! No. My life is devoted to art; can there be room in my heart for any other feeling?"

He made no reply. All his soul was in a wild war of turbulent and uncontrollable emotion. His pent-up heart, which had groaned inwardly for weary years, struggled vehemently for utterance. Everything in this conversation combined to impose silence on him more imperiously than ever; but, by an inexpli-

cable contradiction which often occurs in our wayward and mysterious nature, what should have led him to one course impelled him, irresistibly, to exactly the opposite. He was pale with the last efforts of his will to restrain the expression of the overmastering passion that silently shook him, as he commenced to speak in that suppressed voice which is as full of power and meaning as the first low muttering of the thunder in the distant hills.

"You are changed, Naomi. O, very greatly changed! There was a time when you would not, could not have spoken to me as you have just done—would not and could not have done it, knowing what you must inevitably know."

She looked at him, a little shaken out of her usual marble composure.

"'Knowing what I must inevitably know,'" she repeated. "Why, what do I know, Angelo?"

"What do you know?" his voice rang with a bitter scorn. "You know that in all the world there is but one woman whose image could fill my heart—and that she is irrevocably denied me. You know that for years the thought of her has haunted my solitude and my dreams. Look around this room. Does not her noble face in all its myriad expressions glow on you from every marble? Do not feign ignorance—that is unworthy of you. You know well that it is one who saved me from a life of vice and misery—she to whom I owe every elevating thought, every noble aspiration; to whom, in one one word, I owe *all*, and render all—my gratitude, my adoration. Must I say it is you—*you*, Naomi, whom I love, before you will recognize the fact? You need not shrink. No absurd and presumptuous hope has prompted these words. I know how mad is the dream I have cherished, and it is enough to feel myself the slave of a fruitless passion. Do not mock me, do not insult me, by speaking to me of marriage and of happiness, as though I had a poor, weak heart of dough, that could be tamely moulded to your will."

As he uttered the last words he rose, and with a vehement gesture of scorn and indignation, strode rapidly up and down the room. Twice Naomi had striven in vain to interrupt him; but long before he finished she sat in silence, with bowed head, and her face hidden in her hands. Every reproachful word of his fell on her ear with all the force of justice, melting away the scoffing, icy scepticism with which she had viewed his feelings for her. To the depths of a nature unsurpassed in generosity when rightly appealed to, she was moved with remorseful sympathy and poignant regret—silent tears forced their way through her fingers, and fell one by one upon her heaving bosom.

For many minutes he continued his agitated walk; but gradually his steps grew slower; the vivid fire of his eye dimmed; and the color came again to his cheek. The storm had spent itself. The firm, noble character which, for many a year till now, no whirlwind of passion had dashed from its foothold, resumed its sway. Slowly, and with downcast eyes, abashed and contrite, he drew near Naomi.

"I have wronged, grieved, offended you, Naomi—my benefactress—my sister! Can you pardon me? Can you forget the rash words that I have spoken? Words that I had never dreamed could issue from my lips by any possibility. It was the first—it shall be the last time. Be considerate with me this once. Ah! you, whose life is all one scene of triumph, can poorly comprehend the yearning of a heart full to overflowing—the anguish of unrequited love. Speak to me, Naomi! One little word to say that I am pardoned!"

She took the hand he timidly extended to her in both her own, and laid it against her cheek all wet with tears; then in a faltering voice, she said:

"*I* have nothing to pardon, Angelo. I can only mourn the pain I have caused you—and weep that I have lost my cherished brother."

"You have not lost your brother," he said earnestly. "I am to you whatever you would have me be—proud, happy to hold any place in your esteem; your sisterly love is dearer to me than the life-devotion of any other. Oh! do not make me suffer with your tears! I am your brother, Naomi—your happy, grateful brother of other days—Oh, weep no more!"

But Naomi, with all her proud self-mastery and stoical power of endurance, her soul stirred by an overpowering emotion, was subjugated for a moment by the vehemence of her nature, habitually held in such tight check that, once loosened, it swept all before it. He rightly said she knew it—yet never till now had she realized that to this much-prized nature she had brought the bitterest of all pain. With no wild passionate wail of agony, such as had been sometimes hers, but with a quiet yet unrestrained sorrow, the tears welled up from her sore and tired heart.

He said no more, but standing by her, calm though very pale, bent on her his sad, dark eyes, full of love and pity for her—pity for himself, too, perchance.

She calmed at length; dried her tears, and raised her drooping head. In a low voice, she said:

"I cannot talk now, Angelo. What I have to say will be better said hereafter. It is late, and I must go home. Will you ring, and see if my coach is below?"

He did so, made the inquiry, and learned that the carriage was in waiting. He repeated this to Noami, and approaching a half-finished bust resting on a pedestal, stood with his eyes absently fixed on it, while she arose and wound about her head the scarf she wore in place of bonnet—then hesitatingly moved nearer him. Her old, frank, familiar manner was quite changed; she could not proffer him the sister's good-night kiss as was her wont. She laid her hand timidly upon his arm:

"Good-night, dear Angelo. God bless you!"

He turned, and it was strange to see that it was he who was calm and strong, sprung suddenly to the majesty of noble man-

hood; and she, with wavering color and uncertain step, melted into very womanhood.

"I see," he said, with a quiet mournfulness in his tone, "I must be punished for my fault; you coldly reach me your hand —I have indeed ceased to be your brother."

She drew his head down on her shoulder, and left a kiss and a tear upon his brow, and he, with his brave self-control, held his pulses in their natural beat, and calmly felt the pressure of her lips.

He followed through the darkening corridors—down the winding stairs, to her carriage door—handed her in—heard once more her low-murmured, "God bless you, Angelo!" (O! his name was softest music when her lips pronounced it), then turned him back again to his desolate room. Statues, and busts, and paintings were all shrouded in the gloom of gathering night; and to him heavier than anywhere, the shadow fell on the spot where she had last stood. He sat down, cold, and white, and still, gazing at vacancy with fixed eyes—not thinking—not feeling even—but stunned by the reality, never so realized before, of his great, hopeless sorrow.

CHAPTER XVII.

Naomi to Angelo.

This is my adieu to you, Angelo; for when you receive it, I shall have quitted London. Dear, dear brother, do not reproach me for this step. It is very hard and painful to me, for never before has your brotherly tenderness been so necessary to me; but it is better for you. Absence will soon cure you of your illusion. Yes; illusion, Angelo—for what else can it be? How would you have me believe that you *love*, *passionately love*, a woman who is your elder in years, and who, in what constitutes the *real* difference in age, *knowledge of life*, might be your mother? I know that, when I am far away, you will get at a truer conception of your own feelings.

O! believe that it is a sacrifice for me to leave you. No tie of tenderness binds me to any other being on earth; and o'er my past, Angelo,

"Swirls a dark sea of tears."

Intimate as we have been, you yet know nothing of my history, nor may you know while I live; but if you survive me, you shall read the record of your sister's days. Poor, melancholy shades of past miseries! Often enough they wander back uncalled; I will not summon them now. Yet, be sure of this, if you suffer, if your heart sinks down with the unshared pain of its loneliness, that your sister—she whose fate you think so enviable—draws no one breath of happiness, but bears about a raging, never-ceasing conflict in herself. This is *all* I can tell you; and you must never ask me more.

Courage, brother! Struggle against the hallucination that

has interrupted our sweet intercourse. When you can write me with your own noble truthfulness, that in *heart* and *soul* you have again become my *brother*, then with what joy will I rejoin you, and blend our divided lives in one! Oh! I had so hoped to find peace beside you; but peace, no less than happiness, eludes my grasp.

I go to Venice. Write me there very—very soon. If I was cruel to you in our last interview, pardon and forget it, Angelo, in the name of our old happy days. Remember that I shall expect a letter immediately, at *Venice*.

God keep you! God give you happiness! It is asked of Heaven as sincerely, and far more hopefully than for herself, by the heart of your fond sister,

NAOMI.

LONDON, Nov. 4, 18—.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It is going to be a magnificent sunset. Was there ever anything more beautiful than those long, quivering reflections of palaces and churches in the water?"

"This sky is even more lovely than ours; is it not, Justo?"

"No; more varied, but not so pure; not so immeasurably far off as to steal us away from earth, as does our Cuban heaven."

"See! there is our gondola now. Are you ready, Justo? Are you, Mamma?"

"It is you, Lola, who, as usual, are not ready. Where is your mantilla? Allow me! Is it well so?"

She answered with an eloquent look of her great dark eyes. A vivid color tinged her olive cheek at his touch; and, in the shadow of her mantle, her little fingers caressingly sought and reluctantly quitted his clasp. Then, preceded by Mrs. Silva, they descended and took their places in the gondola.

A gondola resembles much a carriage-top placed in the centre of a canoe, the prow of which rises in a graceful curve. In the stern, the gondolier, standing erect, propels it with an oar. Listlessly reclining in his seat, his hat in his hand, and the gentle wind playing with his beautiful black hair, Justo watched the thousand boats shooting out over the canal in every direction. They had been floating along thus for some fifteen minutes, when Lola, who was, as usual, more observant of Justo than of anything else, saw his cheek suddenly pale and his eyes light; and her glance, eagerly following his, beheld within a gondola very nearly abreast at that moment, a female form sway backward and forward upon her seat, and then, losing her balance, fall forward to the bottom of the gondola.

Justo started to his feet.

"A lady has fainted there," gasped he, hurriedly; "and she is all alone; go to the Palazzo Ducale—I will be with you in a moment." And before the astonished Lola had time to unclose her pale lips, he threw himself with a bound into the gondola, which was already shooting past, and, drawing the rose-colored curtain over the aperture that in these boats serves as door and window, was entirely hidden from view.

Was it not some perverse trick of his imagination? Could it be that there—positively there at his feet—was lying the insensible form of Castadini; rare, precious, worshipped Castadini?

He lifted her gently to a seat, sustaining her with his arm, and, leaning out the aperture opposite the one he had curtained, cried out in Italian to the gondoliero:

"The lady has fainted here; row quickly into some more retired part of the canal."

He was obeyed. The gondoliero bent vigorously to his oars, and in a minute there was a wide expanse of water before them, with scarcely a gondola visible. Then Justo undrew the curtain, rested Naomi's head upon his shoulder, and dipping his handkerchief in the water, tenderly bathed her brow and temples.

What thought had he of Lola? What memory of his fancied cause of jealousy? For the first—first time, his trembling arm encircled—timidly even now—that loved form. He gazed down unabashed into that face, marbly white and still, but full of entrancing beauty to him; the face that, ever floating before him, had smiled between him and his affianced, and showed him how poor had been his imagined love for her.

Presently he saw a faint flush steal into Naomi's cheeks; her eyelids quivered, and her lips, almost imperceptibly parting, emitted a low, gasping sigh. Then suddenly there spread over her face, so impassive an instant before, a radiant glow, an expression so nearly approaching beatitude, that Justo, absorbed and intoxicated, could without much effort have persuaded

himself that she was not swooning, but peacefully sleeping in his loving arms.

Well might Naomi's face wear the look it did, when, coming gradually to herself, forgetful for the moment of everything that had passed, she found all her being pervaded by a sense of bliss so new and ineffable, that she feared to move, to breathe, half believing that some enchanting dream held her senses in thrall, and that at the slightest gesture the intangible thing would melt into air. For several minutes she had not sufficient energy to seek to know where she was; but at last, very slightly opening her eyes, she saw, with a thrill of infinite joy, that adored face bending over her with such loving compassion, and felt his hand, with all the gentleness of a woman, pass and repass upon her brow. Her head reclined upon his shoulder, his arm sustained her, and the wind wafted his hair upon her cheek. The little gondola rocked softly upon the undulating waves, breaking into golden ripples all around them in the sun's last glories. O! thou sweet dream of heaven, stay awhile!

Alas! full consciousness *would* come, the memory of *all would* rush back. It was but common politeness, common kindness of heart, that had brought him there. With a long, deep, bitter sigh, she returned to reality, moved, unclosed her eyes, and sat up.

He changed as instantaneously as she did. The eloquent glow of emotion faded, and left his face cold and grave. Withdrawing his arm, and moving a little further off, he said, in a tone which he endeavored to render simply polite, but in which, spite of himself, trembled the earnest undertone of deep feeling:

"I trust that you are better, Señora?"

"Much better—quite well. I am subject to these attacks. I owe you many thanks." She said these few words falteringly, and with a bewildered manner.

His brow darkened more and more. Fool! to have permitted himself to believe for an instant that the unexpected sight of him could have affected her. His lip curled with scorn of him-

self, as the recollection of how he had last beheld her came rushing over him, filling him again with the gnawing agony of jealousy.

Weak, and pale, and tremulous from head to foot, she leaned against the side of the boat, and looked at him with her earnest, longing eyes. Chance, or fate, had mysteriously thrown them together again. They were alone; *could* he—and would he speak now? It was so little that she craved—only one word to assure her that, though their destinies might lie far asunder, though the distance of the world might divide them, yet *his love was hers.* Could he not *divine* the weight of misery that oppressed her? Would he not let one ray of divine light shine in upon the darkness of her soul.

The gondola floated quietly along over the bright-tinted waters, the clouds passed from rosy to a gorgeous crimson, still Justo sat in silence. How should he indifferently speak of common-place matters, with such a tumult of love, and jealousy, and rage within him? He dared not look at Naomi. If his eyes should rest again upon her, he should forget duty and pride; should lose sight of the fact of her love for another; should audaciously, madly take her in his arms and claim her as his own. Already the impulse was upon him; he must escape from this suffocating atmosphere. In a hoarse, trembling voice, he said, abruptly:

"Señora, I left my party very suddenly, and, as you are well now, I must rejoin them. May I bid the gondoliero near the bank, and leave me here?"

She heard him with a pang that cleft her heart with a sharp, physical pain; and, fearing to trust her voice, bowed her head assentingly, watching him as he gave the order, with a wild thought in her brain. What if she drew near, and clasped his hand, and told him — lost, reckless, palpitating with passion — that in leaving her in this strange, cold manner, he was tearing away her very existence! But pride, the old, haughty pride, the ruling power of her nature, which not even her illi-

mitable love could utterly beat down beneath its feet, thralled the passionate impulse. She clenched the cold, trembling hands, hidden in the folds of her dress, till the nails entered the flesh; and, with a contracted brow and white, compressed lips, felt the gondola stop, saw the little plank adjusted for landing, and Justo, with one foot upon it, hold out his hand to her. Passively she gave him hers. He scarcely touched it, and, letting it fall, murmured, hurriedly:

"Adios, Señora." Then, as if the thought from its very intensity had escaped him, he added, in a tone so low that only her strained ear could have caught the words:

"*Para siempre, adios!*" and springing lightly to the shore, he darted round the angle of an edifice and disappeared.

She sat gazing around her. Oh! what heavy shadows had crept over sky and water! Why, her desolation was in the very air.

The gondoliero leaned lazily upon his oar, looking at the glittering waves and humming a snatch of a song, awaited orders.

A few rods ahead, the pure marble suffused with a glow of rosy light, rose the towers of the cathedral. Bruised in heart—weary in spirit, she would go there—there, where she might kneel in solitude and darkness—and where, perchance, the presence of the Invisible might lend her consolation.

"To the cathedral."

"Si, Signora."

When the gondola again stopped, and Naomi rose to step ashore, she saw at her feet Justo's handkerchief. She wrung the slight dampness from it and placed it in her bosom; then, wrapping her mantilla closely about her, entered the church.

The last rays of day stole faintly through the stained glass windows, diffusing a dim, religious light, save above the massive winding staircases, where one long ray of sunshine streamed in aslant, rendering more perceptible the surrounding obscurity. A few dark forms, lost in vastness and silence, were kneeling at

long distances apart. Naomi advanced up the middle aisle. Solemn and imposing rose the altar, with its holy pictures, its mystically veiled statues, and pure white flowers, and she sank almost involuntarily to her knees; but no ordinary attitude of prayer could suffice now for that surcharged heart, and with a low, bitter groan she fell prostrate, her burning forehead pressing the cold marble pavement. She did not pray; all elements of prayer were for the time laid to sleep within her. In a mad, desperate wrestle with what she *felt—knew*—to be the *inevitable*, her soul went up in this wild, importunate cry: "Take from me fame, and wealth, and beauty; plunge me into more than my original obscurity; deprive me of every consolation; give me to tread the hardest path that ever woman trod; but grant me the memory—the rapturous memory—of one little word of love from *him!* Let my heart throb deliciously but once, and I will walk along my way, however barren, firmly to the end—unshrinkingly will meet loneliness, and suffering, and death!" She had no room for any other thought—all her being was absorbed in this. Again and again she turned from the conviction that her supplication was vain—unheard; again and again opposed with her rebellious will what indeed seemed the iron decree of fate.

From its very fierceness her emotion spent itself, and she lay at last calm, with the calmness of exhaustion. Night had descended when she rose and with slow steps quitted the church, and took her seat in the gondola. Pure and soft above stretched the star-gemmed heaven; the young moon was up, reflecting its beams upon the tranquil waters. Slow on her bosom sank Naomi's weary head, and her black, shrouding mantle hid from her the light and loveliness that but mocked her despair.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Is not La Castadini here to-night?"

The speaker was a young Venetian nobleman, and he addressed a bevy of gay companions at a splendid fête in Venice.

"Yes," answered one; "I have just seen her. She is looking as beautiful as ever, and it seems that she has lately grown very fond of amusing herself. I meet her everywhere."

"I saw her at Paris last spring," said another. "Has she been long here?"

"Some three months. She concluded one engagement, and became so popular that she was re-engaged. By-the-by, somebody told me that there was a little talk about her and a handsome Cuban in Paris?"

"Talk! No, I think not. There was a Cuban who never missed a night when she sang, threw her flowers, and visited her, I believe; but I imagine there was nothing beyond admiration. He is engaged to a very beautiful girl, to whom, I am sure, he is much attached."

"O, you mean Ameno. He was here in Venice not long ago, but stayed only a few days."

"Probably the air of Venice just at present did not agree with his betrothed's health," remarked the second speaker.

There was a general laugh, followed by a quick hush, for from a group behind the gossipers, leaning on the arm of a fine-looking gentleman, emerged La Castadini herself. Beautiful and brilliant, dressed with all her usual elegance, her face lit up with the animation that made it perfectly irresistible, she acknowledged with a smile and a graceful bend of her head the

salutation of the young gallants, and passed on, followed by a low murmur of admiration.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young Venetian who had first spoken, "she is a glorious creature; and in spite of the little scandals that get circulated about every one, there seems to be a general impression that she is virtuous."

"A very correct impression, I imagine," replied the one who had spoken of having met her in Paris. "There is something in her face that indicates an elevated character."

"So you are a physiognomist, are you? Give me your arm, and we will saunter up and down, and you shall give me your opinion of every one we meet."

With that wonderful elasticity of temperament which had enabled her to rise superior to misfortunes and conquer all obstacles, Naomi had roused to battle with her unhappy love. She possessed wealth and a stainless name, and the portals of society were open to her. She would develop to its highest extent her love of luxury, and receive the admiration that everywhere awaited her. She would rush from one excitement to another, till exhausted nature demanded repose, and leave herself no pause for thought, no time to suffer. To see her in those gay scenes, to mark her radiant face, and listen to her light laughter, no one could realize that care had ever shadowed her brow, or a single bitter tear ever flowed from her eyes. There was no one observant enough to notice that at the slightest pause in the gay conversation, the smile died on her lips, her eyes wandered with a far off look, and her bosom heaved with a deep, noiseless sigh. And thus, at the end of six months, Naomi had won for herself in Venetian society the reputation of a woman overweeningly fond of admiration, and decidedly given to coquetry.

CHAPTER XX.

ANGELO TO NAOMI.

I HAVE not written you for many weeks, dearest sister, but you will not wonder at my silence, nor blame me for it, when I explain to you the reason. I have been absorbed, rapt into the ethereal regions where I shall one day find my home, and I have returned to earth purified, refreshed, and strengthened.

Naomi, I have to announce to you something that will assuredly astonish you, something that I *fear* will pain you. It is that I abandon art—beautiful, noble art—whose ardent votary I have always been. Do not be angry with me. There is but one thing that can justify such a desertion—not love, for that is compatible with it—not love, *but religion.* Have patience, and let me tell you how it happened.

For days, weeks, months perhaps—it seemed an eternity to me, but I cannot tell how long it was in reality—I had felt wearied of *everything.* There was no inspiring joy in the fresh morning light—no peace in the lovely twilight, that, were it only from the fact that you so love it, should have been a consolation. I had no heart to work; the greatest earthly fame seemed to me a miserable vanity, not worth the trouble of attaining. I said with Lamartine: "Allons, je ne savais pas que c'était une chose si difficile que de vivre!" It was while in this mood that I ascended one night to the roof of my studio building, from which, as you know, there is a commanding view of the city—but I cared not for that. I was sick of earth, and wished to contemplate the glorious firmament. I threw myself down along the low wall, rested my arm upon it, and, gazing upwards, fell into thought. O! I thought of many—many

things: of my father; of my poor—*poor* mother; of the forlorn wanderings of my infancy; and, more than all, alas! of its precocious sins—sins which, but for your blessed, saving influence, Naomi, would have grown into monstrous vices. I cannot explain to myself how it was, but I felt so humiliated, so overwhelmed by a sense of my own worthlessness, that my eyes closed, my head sank down upon the hard bricks, and if at that moment I was capable of forming a wish of any kind, it was that I might be annihilated. As I sat thus, a ray of pure, celestial light seemed to stream upon my mental vision, and I could read plainly in the bottom of my soul the cause of all my misery.

"Self," I said to myself, "is the end and aim of all my efforts, all my thoughts, and it is this that renders my existence a fatigue, a load, from beneath whose galling weight I never pass. I have no one to labor for, no one looks to me for happiness; but is there no way in which I may be of use to others, and escape from this ever-present and most unsatisfactory self?" "Look abroad," something seemed to say to me, "through all the world; see how lacking men are in justice and charity towards one another: think, too, that in every human soul resides some little germ of good; go forth and strive to develope it, imitating the example of the holy Crucified One."

I got upon my knees in the darkness; tears—but tears of joy, Naomi, raining from my eyes—and blessed Heaven for the inspiration. Buoyant of heart, and light of step, I rose; my burden had fallen from me. "Yes," I said, "I will take up my cross and follow Christ." He has said: "Come unto me all ye who labor, and are heavily laden, and I will give ye rest." Rest! rest! That is all the happiness that a heart like mine can ask.

You know that my religious principles are like your own, and that I have no faith in creeds. The errors and absurdities of humanity have mingled with all religions. It

is only the spirit of Christ's teachings that breathes divinity. Nevertheless, in order to be a regularly constituted missionary, and also because my want of fortune would not permit me to devote myself to the missionary life independently, it was necessary to attach myself to some sect; and I have chosen the Unitarian as being the most liberal. I have been accepted, and have received a mission in India for an indefinite length of time.

I have disposed of all relics of my artist life, except your gifts and my Sappho—my ideal, whom I love as well as Pygmalion loved his statue-bride. This I leave with a friend; and with my staff in hand, set my foot upon the pilgrim's path.

Enough of myself. One word of her who now alone, of all the world, divides the thought of my great Master's work. No, not divides—I wrongly said—for in every thought of her I find a purifying, elevating power, and new strength to toil, and struggle, and bear, as I am sure that *she* has toiled, and struggled, and borne.

How is it with you, Naomi? You speak to me of being ever busied; of having engagements for months in advance, and of whirling in a perfect vortex of gaiety, but never do my eyes rest on the words they so anxiously seek: "Angelo, I am happy." Dear, noble sister, so worthy of Heaven's choicest blessings, so fitted to appreciate them, how shall I reconcile it with the justice of Providence that you should suffer? I have never before referred, even indirectly, to a passage in your letter of adieu; nor do I do so now with any inquisitorial wish to fathom what you would have hidden; my only motive is that you may know that every pain of yours is a double pain to me; and that there is one heart in the universe that beats for you with true and earnest sympathy.

I am unable to tell you now at what point I shall be fixed. I will write you always to the care of your

London banker; keep him apprised of your whereabouts, and he will forward my letters to you.

Adieu! I might almost say, that for the first time in my life, I am happy; if it is to be happy to be calm and strong, and feel within the soul a faith as pure, steady, and serene as the glorious star that guided the wise men to Bethlehem. Let your eyes turn sometimes in the direction whither I go. Let me have the consolation of knowing that you, who are family and home and all *on earth* to me, send a sigh, a wish, a regret towards your absent *brother*

ANGELO.

LONDON, April 10, 18—.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRAGMENTS OF A DIARY KEPT BY NAOMI DURING THE ENSUING YEAR.

"VENICE, April 20th.—How I love your serenity, pure, spiritual stars! You rest my dazzled, wearied eyes: you awe into calmness my burning, struggling soul.

"To-night, in crossing the brilliant saloon, I caught a full view of my figure in a long mirror. Wreathed and gemmed, it smiled upon me. False lip that has so well learned to counterfeit nature, that none can detect the cheat! Yet, it is a bitter contrast to see that smile, and feel the heart within. Vain—vain effort to drown remembrance!

"To-morrow I leave Venice. I have lingered here so long (poor, weak, prideless heart) only because *he* has breathed its air.

"FLORENCE, July 5th.—This visit has left me full of strange and contradictory emotions. What shall I think of this man? Did he speak to me with sincerity? It must be so. A man of his age, of his gravity of character, could not be capable of inventing such a fable. No! no! surely he told me the truth; and yet, fatal result of experience, a doubt will come! Then, too, there is a kind of inconsistency in what he says. Well! well! time will prove.

"'I wonder,' he said, 'if every human heart suffers to the extent of its capabilities?' 'To the extent,' I said, 'and sometimes beyond, for there are those who succumb beneath the burden too heavy to be borne.' What sympathy I felt for him when he told me he had no one in the world to love. I am always inspired with an earnest wish to console those who are

tormented with this great soul-void. The happy do not attract me, they do not need me, and though I seek no consolation for my own sorrows, I love to strive to console those who have sufficient sensibility to suffer as I do; and it is strange, that when I see the weak and unhappy, I feel stronger, better able to struggle and wait.

"July 12th.—The conversation of last night and that of to-day has dissipated all my doubts. Ah! how little do men see and know, even the most penetrating of them, to call *this love*. What a sacrilege! Love! the noblest, purest, divinest sentiment that animates the human heart, that elevates the soul, that purifies and strengthens the nature *even when it is* unhappy! To call this terrestrial passion *love*, this caprice that would pass in an hour, and to think to deceive me with *words; me* who know, alas! too well, what *love* is, and in what way it manifests itself.

"July 14th.—I am a mystery and a marvel to myself. Why is it that this blind, obdurate, insensate hope still lives within me? I know that I have no right to hope, that I have nothing whereon to found a hope; and yet all the efforts of my reason are not sufficient to enable me to *will* to abandon it.

"O! if it were possible for me to see the future; to know whether he loves me; to penetrate for one instant his most secret thoughts! My God, enlighten me! bless my love or destroy it! And yet, what an inexplicable contradiction! I cannot say this from my heart. It would be sacrilegious to pray for the annihilation of a sentiment so rooted in my very being —a passion so ardent and profound that it has swallowed up everything else in my nature.

"A vain love—what can there be in life more hopelessly sad? Sad, but withal sublime; for unrequited passion, which, if happy, would necessarily partake in some degree of the terrestrial, is purified and spiritualized till it becomes the holiest heart-incense offered up before the shrine of its adoration.

"To thee, thou silent page, on which, while I live, no eye

save mine will ever look, I can confide what I could not—would not breathe to any human being for all the universe. Here I can freely, fearlessly pour out my heart and soul, and even this is a balsam to the wounded heart. I am weary, *so* weary of the eternal *performance* of life, where everything *seems* and so little really *is*.

"July 20th.—All day I have been pondering on the words of Jesus, which Angelo quotes in his last letter: 'Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give ye rest.'

"Sweet, sublime Jesus, sealing and sanctifying his divine doctrine by the offering of his holy life upon the cross!—would that I could learn from thee, thou noble model of all virtue, to suffer with patience, to carry my cross *in silence*, resting, like thee, my tired heart upon the Infinite!

"If it had but pleased heaven to grant me his love, and cast my lot with his, what happiness it would have been to live unknown to fame, forgetting and forgotten! I could have had no personal ambition, no wish or will apart from him; and what little poor genius I possess, like everything else in my being, would have been absorbed in my love. *His, his only!* What inconceivable bliss there is in that thought! Let me forget it! let me forget it!

"August 3d.—At sea. Solemn, mystical ocean! hast thou too an unquiet soul that will not let thee rest? Hast thou, too, some hidden sorrow that spite of thee betrays itself in thy eternal turbulence and unceasing wail? Thou art likened to eternity, but in thy ebb and flow, in thy vast, wild surging, thou art more like the human soul. Kindred thou art to me: even as thou, do I struggle with the immutable—and as vainly, alas! as vainly.

"NAPLES, November 15th.—Angelo, poor Angelo! Ungrateful, unkind that I am, I seldom think of him, though he so desired that my eyes should sometimes wander towards his distant home. Alas! my eyes roam round the horizon, wondering

where *he* is. Ah, if I could but know! It seems even to me a puerility, but it is a positive pain to me to think that perhaps at this moment I have turned my face from the point that holds *him*.

"Oh! of late I am weary, very weary of life, seeing before me nothing but this unvarying, barren suffering. However long I may live, there can never be for me a single instant of happiness. For this—I feel it, know it, with the profound conviction that cannot deceive—*this is the love of my life.* Strange! strange! I cannot comprehend it, and yet it is a fact, that there is no longer in me any capacity for loving. For all men except *him* my heart is dead, my senses icy.

"Let me sleep and dream of him, see him, hear him, speak to him. Come to me, sweet illusion! Come to me! He also will sleep, and perhaps—no, no! *he* does not love me.

"November 20th.—I have received a brilliant offer for an engagement in Paris, and have accepted it. I am like those religious martyrs who delight in increasing their own tortures. I will go. I will intensify more, if possible, all my memories. I feel a kind of cruel, bitter pleasure in my own utter misery.

"PARIS, December 31st.—To stand again upon that spot and find all changed; unknown faces looking from the windows, unknown children playing in the garden—it seems a dream! What is life? Leaning against the garden gate this morning, I bitterly asked myself the question. It is this poor moment, which is already flying from us; it is the memory, for the most part, of pain and disappointment—all devoured at last by the dark, fathomless abyss of time, which silently swallows everything. It is, indeed, as Heredia sublimely calls it, 'a delirium.' Love! love! thou art the only reality of existence; the rest is but a vain phantasmagoria, that flits before the vision and is gone.

"I remained for a long time contemplating that house, with a feeling of exhausted weariness; and, as it always does at such times, the thought came to me: 'If I could be folded to his

breast once, *knowing that he loved me*, what a blissful thing it would be to die;' and it seems to me that this is the only earnest wish of my heart—the only vital idea of my brain.

"January 2d.—I am deeply saddened to-night by the history that the Doctor related to me. Poor girl! separated from him she loved by a cruel fate; doubtful, even, if she were still loved, yet finding in her own heart a fidelity that defied absence and estrangement. My eyes filled with tears when the Doctor repeated her noble words: 'Doctor, you know that I am alone, poor, unaided; well, the other day I had a dishonorable but yet brilliant offer from a man of wealth and position. I will confess to you, spite of the shame it causes me, that for one single instant I was—*not tempted*—but I conceived the *possibility* of accepting; then, with the bitterest humiliation, I turned from the thought. "No," I said proudly; "it has pleased Heaven to deny me happiness, but I will deserve it; and though I may have lost it, yet I will never cease to be worthy of Albert's love."'

"And with this great heart she died at last of want and despair! O! if there be not somewhere a recompense for all these unseen tears, these silent, wasting agonies, what is existence but a bitter cheat that we must curse in helpless—hopeless despair?

"March 1st.—Angelo is in London! How my heart bounded when I touched his letter, the first that I have received directly from him during all this long year! Feeble as I am from long illness, I must hasten to him. His letter is calm and grave, but full of gentle tenderness. He says: 'I yearn to see you. Come to me, Naomi! You need not fear—it is a *brother alone* that you will meet. I am purified from earthly passion; I have offered my heart upon a higher altar, and it has been accepted.' I believe him—it rejoices me to believe him. Dear Angelo, spite of the one absorbing thought of my life, he holds a very tender place in my heart. I will go to him; I may find comfort with him now."

CHAPTER XXII.

It was a still, cool, Sabbath morn in London, rather an early hour for church-goers; the usually thronged and busy streets were silent and deserted, save in the vicinity of a Unitarian church, standing in an elegant quarter of the city, into which people were already pouring to hear the young missionary, Penar, lately returned from India, whose eloquence had electrified them on the preceding Sabbath.

The hour for the commencement of service was approaching, when, through the group collected about the door, a woman, dressed with elegance, but entirely in black, and whose face was concealed by a heavy lace veil, made her way with a rapid and rather imperious step. The church was already so full that it seemed very doubtful whether she could find a place; but after standing gazing about her for a moment, a gentleman politely offered her his seat, which she accepted with a graceful inclination of the head.

Some one rose and came forward in the pulpit, and there was a general stir and turning of eyes towards it, but it was the grave, middle-aged pastor, who knelt and made the accustomed prayer; then he rose and drew back, and, after a slight pause, the slender, drooping figure of the young missionary came slowly to the front. The veiled lady leaned forward with breathless eagerness, and, could the surrounding eyes have penetrated her thick veil, they would have seen her eyes fill with tears, which after a moment rolled unheeded over her pale cheeks.

Angelo stood in perfect silence for at least a minute. His pale face was pervaded by a kind of holy tranquillity, but the burning lustre of his dark eyes betrayed the repressed fervor of his

enthusiastic soul. At last, in a tone full, sonorous, but pure, soft, and melodious as a harp-strain, came the words, "If ye love me keep my commandments."

Strangely unprefaced, and for that very reason sublimely impressive, were those words ringing clearly through the hushed church. Then he spoke at length of the *spirit* of Christ's life and teachings; of the subserviency of all forms to the divine *idea* which can alone animate religion, and render it inseparable not only from our deeds and words, but from our very thoughts.

It is the *real earnest interior* striving after truth, and purity, and love, the vital elements of the soul—the fervent, untiring efforts of the chrysalis to find its hidden wings and soar, though for a time it be condemned to drag its length upon the ground. For this we have Christ's words: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit and *they* are life."

Angelo's enunciation was delightfully distinct, and his voice exquisitely modulated. He warmed into enthusiasm, and his face glowed with an expression that was almost inspired; yet it was a spiritualized enthusiasm that partook in no degree of the passion and vehemence of earthly interests. He would fain have drawn all men to him by the force of love alone, covering their past with the holy mantle of charity, and hopefully pointing them to the future.

"To love, and pity, and pardon," he said, in conclusion, "these were the commandments of the holy exponent of the Divine Will, and if we ground our faith upon these principles, we may be sure we are obeying him who consecrated his existence to the advancement of our erring humanity."

The congregation stood to receive the blessing, and with a last glance, sweet and sad, that seemed to embrace them all, and consign them in very deed to the care of Heaven, the young preacher turned away.

Through all, the veiled lady had been the most attentive listener, and at the close, so profound was her abstraction, that it

was not until politely requested to make way for those further in the pew, that she rose with a slight start, and passed into the broad aisle. So great was the throng that it was several minutes ere she was able to gain the street, and there she was again forced to wait the turn of her carriage. The coachman, however, hastened this by some adroit manœuvre; and entering the carriage, apparently quite unconscious of the many curious eyes that followed her, she was driven rapidly away, taking the direction of a retired quarter of the city, and stopping at length before a handsome but unpretentious looking house.

The coachman rang the bell, and the door was opened.

"Ask if Mr. Penar is at home now?" the lady said, from the window.

The answer was that he had just returned, and was in his own apartment, to the right upon the first floor. Before the sentence was half finished, the lady, unclosing the carriage door herself, leaped agilely out, ran up the steps and through the hall, and, seemingly governed by an irresistible impulse, threw open the door designated by the servant, and rushed in. The young missionary was in an inner room, standing beside a table, on which he had just deposited his hat and papers. He looked up with an exclamation of surprise at the sudden opening of the door, and in another moment Naomi lay sobbing in his arms.

The quiet servant maid discreetly closed the door—the brother and sister were alone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANGELO was a little, just a very little pale, and the arms with which he encircled Naomi trembled almost imperceptibly. With this exception he was calm, quite calm; and a father might have received his daughter with the same joyful yet tranquil tenderness.

But Naomi for many minutes was *not Naomi.* Her bosom heaving with short, gasping sobs, she laid her head on Angelo's shoulder, and from beneath her closed eyelids welled fast her bitter tears—tears wrung, oh, how hard, from the agony of her proud heart!

He drew her gently to a sofa, placed her upon it, and seated himself beside her. Then he tenderly removed her bonnet and cloak, and waited quietly till her emotion should subside. She let him do what he would, her pride paralysed, her will passive, docile for the moment as a child. But the old, governing influence of her life came back with a great revulsion of feeling. With a smile of disdain at her own weakness, she brushed away her tears impatiently, and turning, took both Angelo's hands in her own.

"Do you recognize your sister, Angelo?" she said; "she whom you used to call firm, strong, invulnerable? The sight of you after our long separation, the thought of all you must have passed through, the remembrance of—" She paused with a suppressed sigh—"all the past overcame me for a moment, but it is over now. Did they tell you that I was here early this morning?"

"No; I had but just entered."

"I arrived in town late last night, and came here the first thing to-day. You had but just gone out. Then I hastened to the

church, and heard your eloquent, beautiful words. Angelo, you are worthy to be an apostle of Jesus."

"Worthy only in my zeal, which devotes all my life to this one object."

"And you have found happiness, dear brother? Your face would seem to say so."

"Peace, Naomi; happiness is not of this world, at least not for some of us."

There was a touch of unconscious mournfulness in his grave tone, and, though in no wise so intended, it struck Naomi like a reproach. A flush went to her brow, and then left her pale again.

"For how long are you here, Angelo?"

"I do not precisely know; for some months, I presume."

Naomi sat for a minute in thoughtful silence, with downcast eyes; then she said:

"Angelo, if I should say to you, *I need you;* do not leave me while—*while I need you*—could you grant me this—make me such a sacrifice?"

Over his face there played a smile as sad and wan as a ray of cold winter sunlight on the snow, and it was answer enough without the words which followed—words spoken very quietly, indeed:

"Naomi, you know that there is nothing that you could ask me that I would refuse."

"Well, then, so let that rest; we will speak of it hereafter. Now, tell me, how is it that I have received no letters from you?"

"I do not know. I wrote you whenever I found an instant's time. The mails, however, within the last year have been irregular, and this probably explains it."

Naomi, caressingly clasping Angelo's hand, leaned back in her seat, and was silent for several minutes; and he, with hushed but profound sadness, contemplated her pale, worn, changed face, so reft of its old healthfulness and witching brilliancy of

expression. He would not pain her by speaking of it, but she had already read his thoughts in his eyes.

"You find me altered, Angelo," she said. "You would not wonder if you could know how I have dissipated of late; almost always after the performance attending a ball, or some gay supper, and going to rest at dawn. I am just recovering from a severe, even dangerous attack of my old disease; and now I intend to be very quiet, and take good care of myself, or rather my dear brother will take care of me. I do not care enough for myself to undertake the thankless task."

She laughed, a forced and bitter laugh, and rising, paced abstractedly up and down for a moment, and then resumed her seat, saying:

"Speak to me of yourself, Angelo. Tell me all that has happened to you since we parted."

"There will be time enough for that hereafter, dear sister. You look pale and exhausted. Let me arrange the pillows of the sofa, and you lie down and rest awhile. No one will come. You will—will you not?"

Naomi was in truth wearied, and she yielded after a little hesitation. Angelo covered her with her cloak, noiselessly crossed the room and drew the blinds a little closer, and then sat down by the great, round, baize-covered table, and bent assiduously over his papers.

The room was perfectly silent for several minutes, and then Naomi's gentle, regular breathing indicated that she had fallen asleep. Any one would have supposed from Angelo's motionless figure that he was entirely absorbed in his occupation, but there was a mist before his eyes, and all his being centred in this one aspiration of his prayerful heart: "O Lord! let not that old, fatal delirium take possession of me again!" But the temptation to look upon her as she slept was irresistible; he turned and contemplated her with his head bowed on his hand. O, what unutterable melancholy there was in that sleeping face! The marble-smooth brow, the large, statuesque eyelids, were in

some inexplicable way mutely eloquent of suffering. As Angelo gazed upon her, such a feeling of reverence stole over him that he could have fallen on his knees as before the image of some holy saint; and he had need to pray: "O Lord! let not that fatal delirium take possession of me again!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

In a delightful part of the environs of London, combining the advantages of town and country, in a small but elegant dwelling, the brother and sister took up their abode. Neither spoke to the other of the time they should occupy it, or of plans for the future. Angelo silently and blindly placed himself at Naomi's disposition; and Naomi acted from the unspoken, perhaps unacknowledged thought, that her career of glitter and triumph was finished.

From being the cynosure of all eyes, the theme of every tongue wherever she appeared, she passed in a moment into the retirement of a profoundly solitary and unvarying life. She was often alone, and wrote much; what, she said not, and Angelo never asked. The piano was never opened, and never did one delicious note of melody issue from her lips. In the evening she would wander into the parlor, recline listlessly in a great arm-chair by the centre-table, and listen to Angelo while he read. Sometimes, with a sudden flash of the old fire, she would rouse and talk brilliantly for a few moments, then sink again into silence. It was on one of these occasions that Angelo, glancing at her from his book, saw that she was lying back in her chair quite insensible. With the aid of restoratives she came to herself in a few minutes; but this occurrence left on Angelo's mind an ineffaceable conviction that her health was thoroughly undermined. As the summer progressed, these swoons were of more frequent recurrence, yet she would see no physician, take no remedies. When had medicine ever cured these fatal chronic maladies, she said. The disease might take a favorable turn of itself, and if it did not, why—and her sorrow-

ful glance would dwell for a moment on Angelo, and then seek the ground.

Very frequently, and at all hours, but oftenest beneath the watching stars, he would find her on the veranda, her arms crossed on the balustrade, her head bowed on them, and her eyes fixed upon the heavens, quite oblivious of all surroundings.

And he, so patient and calm, so quietly thoughtful of her always, and in her presence cheerful for *her sake*, what were his *real feelings?* He knew not—cared not to know; turned resolutely from every thought, save that in her hour of sorrow it was his to strive to make her hidden grief less bitter to be borne. Yet he was but mortal, and though he might not listen to his heart, he could not annihilate it; and this life wore upon him. It was visible only in the martyr's look which his face gradually assumed; in that rare, hopeless smile, so sweet, so sad, that no young, fresh heart could have seen it without tears. Yes; there are greater martyrs in the world than those who have perished at stakes—who bear their cross walking erect and with a firm step, and wear their crown of thorns with a smiling lip.

An ideal love, cherished in silence and suffering, why, what an utter absurdity it would seem to the honest, practical people of the every day world! They can understand easily enough a rational affection based upon some solid foundation; and for them a foundation has its firmest cement in *self;* but they look down with the condescending pity of superior minds on these dreamers, these livers upon illusions, who get enthusiastic at sunlight, and moonlight, and flowers. "Be practical," they will tell you; "grasp the realities of life and give up your dreams." Poor owls! calling the darkness light, and the nothingness of materialism existence, it is you who are the dreamers; it is you who live upon illusions; for *your realities* are the veriest shadows. Your ledger, the most important thing of life for you, invisibly decays before your eyes; your proudly towering counting-houses crumble insensibly towards their final dust; and when you, your petty interests and ambitions, your very

names, shall have passed into oblivion, love will still smile upon the world in all the glory of its immortal youth; and the sublime Ideal will still allure its votaries into the beautiful and mysterious land that stretches into infinitude.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was on his return one cool autumn day from a visit of mercy to some of the poor outcasts of London, that Angelo found Naomi pacing the parlor with a step that had regained some of its old buoyancy. Dusty and fatigued with a long ride, he would have passed at once to his apartment, but the unwonted animation of her face as he caught sight of it arrested him, and he stopped at the door.

"Angelo!" She approached with a quick step and drew him into the room. "What do you suppose has happened this morning?"

"Evidently something agreeable, dear. But don't—pray don't get excited."

"The *impresario* of the new opera troupe found me out, how, I am sure I can't imagine, and came this morning to see me. There is going to be a reunion of all the great artistes, to sing an opera for the benefit of some charitable association, and he so urged me to join it that I consented."

"Consented! Naomi, are you wild? You to undergo the exhausting fatigue of an opera, when only two days ago you fainted at going rapidly up-stairs!"

"It will do me good. This life of inaction is killing me."

"Think better of it, I beg of you; think better of it. In your state of health it would be the height of temerity."

"Great Heaven! what is my life?" she cried bitterly. "To drag this weary sense of suffering through days of monotony, is *this* existence?"

A vivid flush crimsoned his pale face, and with a movement of impetuosity rare in him he walked rapidly away.

Not a minute had elapsed ere the thought of his unselfish love, his abnegation of every wish of his own for her sake, had rushed upon her, and before he had entered his room her hand was on his arm, and she said, falteringly, breathless from the rapidity with which she had ascended the stairs:

"Pardon me, dear brother! pardon me!"

He kissed her brow.

"Naomi, you will not sing?"

"I have promised. I want to—I must. I know—I feel—that it will not hurt me. Come! be willing—be pleased."

"I see," he said, with a deep sigh, "it is in vain for me to oppose it. But remember, whatever the consequences be, it was against my will."

"*I* will take the responsibility of all consequences. And now for my preparations, for I have but little time. To-day is Friday; Monday the opera comes off. O, I feel like my old self again!" and she ran gaily away.

He stood for minutes gazing in the direction where she had disappeared, and when at last he turned away, his eyes were blind with sorrowful tears.

CHAPTER XXVI.

For three days the little quiet house was completely revolutionized. What with rehearsals at home and at the theatre, and the visits of tradespeople and modistes, Naomi had not a moment disengaged; and she seemed to have recovered all her old strength and energy, never manifesting the slightest weariness. Angelo watched her anxiously, and as he marked her reanimated face, and the elasticity of her rapid movements, a consoling hope revived within him, and he thought that perhaps, after all, she was right, and that something to do, something to win, might bring her out of the morbid state in which she had pined for so long.

Nevertheless, when Monday night came, and he found himself actually waiting for Naomi in the parlor, he could not, with all his self-command, master his agitation. He was pale, tremulous, and unnerved when she entered, composed as possible in manner, but with the peculiarly brilliant and quick-moving eye that indicates great inward excitement.

They took their places in the Berlin, and rolled at a rapid pace towards the city. The September night was warm, and the carriage top was down. Naomi leaned back in her seat, with her eyes dreamily fixed on the sky.

"You used to love the stars, Angelo," she said thoughtfully, at last.

"And do still, Naomi."

"I love them more than ever. Glorious stars! They seem to me to belong to an order of things different from any other—to appeal more directly to the spiritual part of our nature. They cool and refresh me as does the shade after the noon-day glare."

Angelo looked at her upturned face, so spiritually beautiful, averted his head with a profound though noiseless sigh, and was silent.

At her dressing-room door he pressed her hand and left her, taking his seat in the stage-box she had designated as the one designed for him, and waiting with a quick-beating heart to witness Naomi's performance for the first time for many long years. It seemed to him in his impatience that the orchestra would never form, and then that the overture would never finish; however, it did at length positively come to an end, and the curtain slowly rose. The opera was La Traviata, selected by the management as one of the favorite operas of the day, and also as one of Naomi's greatest *rôles.*

The elegant toilette, the effect of the stage lights, and, more than all, the gay, reckless abandon of Violetta's manner, so completely transformed the prima donna that Angelo with difficulty recognized his sister, and, insensibly carried away, he forgot for the time his haunting fears for Naomi's safety, to follow with intense interest the sorrowful part she so admirably embodied.

Never in her palmiest days had La Castadini sung or acted with more power and passion; never had she moved with more bewildering grace; never had her face, worn with long suffering, been more perfectly in keeping with the character.

Nor had she ever received a prouder ovation than that which awaited her at the close of the opera. Again and again she was summoned before the curtain, covered with flowers, and greeted with tumultuous plaudits.

Through his unlimited sympathy with her, Angelo comprehended for the first time the intoxication of a successful artiste's life. He went to seek her altogether excited out of his habitual calmness; and it was only the sight of her, bringing back with a rush the recollection of the *necessity* of self-command on his part, that subdued him into his usual self-possessed quietude.

But Naomi—O! it was quite in vain for Angelo to gently strive to check her. All the way home she *must* talk, and talk

so excitedly, too, sitting erect with the old proud lift of the head, with the old light of triumph in her eyes, the old vivid flush upon her cheek. Angelo could only listen in an agony of anxiety, and urge the coachman to drive fast. They reached home in a few minutes. Angelo leaped out, and would have taken Naomi in his arms, but, resting her two hands on his shoulders, she bounded lightly to the ground.

"No, I do not need your arm, dear brother," she said, smiling. "I am well—never better;" and with the regal step of other days she passed into the house.

At the farthest right corner of the little parlor a round table was laid for supper, and, by a strange coincidence, the general appearance of the room recalled in every detail the night of Lola's nocturnal visit in Paris. Naomi saw it; it struck her like a blow; and, growing pale, she paused for a moment on the threshold; then, with an impetuous movement, throwing off her opera cloak, she commenced agitatedly pacing up and down the room, burying her face in her hands, and murmuring passionately:

"This very opera, too. O! it recalls! it recalls!"—

Angelo approached, and gently drew her hands from her face:

"Naomi," he said, with mild firmness, "you must not do this. If I were nothing to you, I would not permit you to conspire against your own life in this reckless way. Come! sit down at the table; take something to cool and refresh you, and afterwards a light supper. Come! yield to some one wish of mine, I beg."

She went and took her place at the table, but with eyes fixed on vacancy, like one in a dream. Angelo was preparing for her a glass of orange-flower water, when she hastily filled her wine glass from a bottle of sherry standing near, and, ere he could even remonstrate, drained it off. He looked at her with a face of the blankest amazement, for it was the first time he had ever seen Naomi touch wine.

"O! what a rash thing, Naomi," he cried, reproachfully, "in

your excited state to drink that. Do you wish to kill yourself?"

"Do not talk to me, Angelo. I am burning—parched—breathless."

She turned her face towards him as she said these words, and some papers lying on the corner of the table caught her eye.

"What is this, Angelo?" she said.

"Your Madrid papers. Let me put them by till to-morrow. They should not have been put here."

"I will give them to you in one moment. I only want to see one thing."

She opened the first paper as she spoke; found "Colonial Items;" ran her eye rapidly over it; and, tossing it aside, picked up the other. Scarcely had her eyes rested on it when, with a smothered exclamation, she bent eagerly forward. It was the following paragraph that her starting eyes read, or rather devoured:

"Don Justo Ameno, who was for a short time last year the idol of our saloons, has, we learn by Havana papers, just espoused Doña Dolores Silva, his beautiful young fiancée, who, accompanied by her parents, made with him the tour of the Continent, and lent for a little while the charm of her grace and beauty to Madridleña society."

Naomi carried both hands to her heart, and sprang to her feet as though thrown up by electricity. Her bosom heaved, and her lips parted with a desperate effort at a cry; but no sound issued from her lips. For a moment she stood thus, white and rigid, with fixed and distended eyes, and then she fell heavily into Angelo's outstretched arms. He lifted her as though she had been a child, and bore her rapidly to a window; there, resting one foot upon a chair, he bathed her brow and temples with cologne, and held to her nostrils a bottle of strong salts; for, owing to the frequency of these swoons, restoratives were always at hand.

"Oh, Naomi!" murmured he, aloud, "rash, foolish woman!

How could you pay so little heed to me? And how could I be so weak as to yield to you?"

Minutes passed, yet neither the freshly blowing air, nor the infinitude of remedies which Angelo tried in quick succession, produced any effect. Heavier and heavier grew her form in his arms; lower and lower drooped her head; and with a hurried, fearful look he saw now that her eyes were half open, and that the eyeball was quite immovable. Panic-stricken, frantic, he dashed from him the little flask of cologne, clasping passionately the insensible form, and cried out in a voice of such sharp agony that it might almost have roused the dead:

"Naomi! Naomi! Naomi!"

But there was no response. The unquiet heart that ne'er kept time with life, but thrilled and throbbed with longings unfulfilled, had stilled for aye.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE is a solemn hush upon the room. The golden autumn sunlight streams in coldly here, and even the soft, perfumed air from the garden conveys in some inexplicable way the sickening, desolating impression of death.

How still she lies! What perfect rest is hers at last! The pure white robe clings lovingly to the rounded symmetry of her limbs, and there is a tender half smile on the monumental face, where records of the past can still be traced. Thou fervent heart, that kept thy steady trust in *Good*, and held thyself unspotted from the world! Thou lonely pilgrim to a far-off shrine, cloud-hidden from thy guiding star, and spent upon thy rocky path, thou hast sunk down to rise no more on earth, still clasping to thy breast a precious relic of thy cherished faith!

There is a solitary mourner kneeling there; as still, as white, almost as calm as the fair dead. Perchance the tears have frozen at his heart; perchance he prays.

Why should we weep when the soul-wearied fall into that dreamless sleep that knows no earthly waking? Is it, indeed, so sad a thing to die? Mourn, if thou wilt, for those who die with hands outstretched to pluck illusion's flowers, but mourn not that the gnawing pain of life has ceased to prey upon a tired heart. O! it is better far to lie in this majestic, marble calm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

In Naomi's private secretary, standing in her bed-room, Angelo anxiously sought some written indication of her last wishes; and he had rightly divined; there he found it. There was a large roll of papers, directed to himself, containing her will; in which (as he afterwards learned) she made him, with the exception of a few legacies to faithful servants, *unconditional* heir of all her fortune; then a sealed parcel, bound up with a letter, directed to Don Justo Ameno, Havana; and lastly, some closely written sheets of paper, and a letter for himself; all these silent preparations proving how strong must have been within her the premonition of her speedy death.

To Angelo she wrote that she fulfilled her promise, and left for him a brief record of her agitated life. She thanked and blessed him for his love and goodness to her; and craved at his hands two last favors: the first and most important, to bear himself, to its address, the letter and parcel directed to Don Justo Ameno; the second, to have, at *whatever cost*, her remains *burned, not buried.*

Angelo knew well Naomi's peculiar opinion on this subject, for he had often heard her express her utter horror of the custom of delivering over to the loathsome corruption of the cold, dark grave, the form that is so loved and cherished in life. He himself took the same view of the matter; and it was, therefore, with all the more eagerness that he undertook the accomplishment of her wish. It was an easily arranged affair; the undertaker's hesitancy vanished at sight of a purse containing two hundred pounds in gold, and he agreed to take upon himself the management of the matter. As, however, this disposition of

Naomi's remains must necessarily be kept a profound secret, it was requisite that the funeral in the ordinary form should take place. Angelo conducted this as privately as possible, but the news of the great singer's death had already spread; a lamentation had gone up from every people that had ever been enchanted by the impersonations of her genius, and the carriages of the aristocracy of London followed her body to the vault where it was deposited.

A note, slipped silently into Angelo's hand, informed him that he would be waited for in a wood five miles from the city, at an hour before dawn the next morning.

It was the darkest part of the night when Angelo mounted his horse, and riding at a gallop, reached the spot designated, a few minutes before the appointed time.

He found it to be a little field in the middle of a thick wood, which had once been an orchard, but which had been abandoned as unfertile, and the trees cut down. It was a fit place for the purpose, for there was a perfect wall of foliage about it, forming a sufficiently large circle to prevent any fear of a conflagration among the trees.

Angelo dismounted and tied his horse to a tree. The rays from a dark lantern, shining full on some forms seated on the ground, showed him that the undertaker and his assistants were here before him. The former rose, and after respectfully returning Angelo's salutation, inquired if the gentleman would like to see the preparations. Angelo bowed assent, and the man, holding up his lantern, revealed a pile of wood very compactly arranged in the centre of the field; then, walking a little apart, pointed out the bier, covered with a massive black pall.

Angelo felt as if an iron hand had grasped his throat, and he struggled several minutes before he could steady his voice to speak. He should like to preserve his sister's ashes. How could this be effected? The man answered that the coffin was iron; that iron props might be arranged so as to raise the body within reach of the flames, and that the ashes, falling into the coffin,

might be afterwards collected. Angelo signified his approbation, and his wish that the matter might be conducted as speedily as possible, and then, with his cloak wrapped closely about him, and his hat drawn over his eyes, sought the remotest corner of the field, and sat down in the heavy shadow of a tree. For several minutes he could discern nothing, and heard no sound save the light crackling of the ignited faggots; but at last vivid tongues of flame shot upwards, and crowning the funeral pyre, roseate, life-like in their bright reflections, he saw for one moment *that face*, *that form*, and *realized* that he looked upon it for the *last time*. With a choked cry he fell prostrate, face to earth, biting the dust, and madly tearing his hair in an agony of despair; then his chest heaved with sobs that would not be suppressed, and a torrent of tears streamed from his eyes. He lay there how long he knew not, never caring to rise again, weeping such heart-broken tears as a child might shed upon its mother's grave.

Some one touched him at length, and, dizzy and half blind, he got upon his feet. The first faint light of day had stolen around; the undertaker stood before him, holding in his hands a little bronze urn. He gave it to Angelo; and as he turned away, rough, callous creature as he was, he passed the back of his hard hand over his eyes.

There was a golden glow in the east, and streaks of crimson on the distant horizon; the world awoke and smiled in its joyous beauty; but leading his horse, with slow step, and bowed head, his anguished heart still pouring out its bitter waters, Angelo went upon his way, unmindful of all things save the little urn he carried next his heart. Alas! his house "is left unto him desolate!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the fair American isle, which its great poetess* beautifully and justly calls, "Pearl of the Sea, and Star of the West," Justo was at home in his lovely *quinta*, a little distance from the city of Havana, in the part known as the Cerro.

Before his house the fields lay green and smiling in the verdure of Cuba's eternal spring, bounded in the distance by a blue line of mountains, and dotted here and there by graceful swaying palms.

There was a gay party of people collected on the piazza one bright October afternoon. Lola, beautiful and joyous in her perfected happiness, was talking and laughing with some companions of her girlish days; and Justo, leaning over the balustrade, was conversing with a pretty young Cuban lady who had just returned from a tour in Europe. In the course of conversation she happened to speak of her visit to Venice, and at the sound of the name, Justo falling into sudden silence, allowed her to rattle on uninterruptedly, unobservant of the cloud that had swept over his face, and the melancholy abstraction of his gaze, which expressed the profound sorrow of the associations aroused within him. Standing thus, and gazing down the road, he watched mechanically for several minutes the approach of a man's figure, dressed in black, and seemingly, from the peculiarity of his costume, a priest. He advanced with a slow step, pausing frequently to observe the quintas, as though seeking for some place. As he neared, he removed his hat, and passed his handkerchief over his heated brow, and Justo's wandering thoughts were instantly called back. That

* La Avellaneda

pale, spiritual face, surrounded by long locks of wavy, fair hair —where had he seen it? So perfectly familiar it was to him, so positive was his conviction that he knew it well, that it hardly occasioned him any surprise when the stranger stopped within a few steps of him, and said, in English:

"Will you have the goodness to tell me, sir, if this is the residence of Don Justo Ameno?"

"*I* am that person, sir, at your service," Justo answered, in the same language.

"Will you pardon the interruption, and allow me a few minutes' private conversation? My business is pressing, and my time limited; otherwise I would defer the interview to a more suitable hour."

Justo took his hat from a chair beside him, politely begged his companion to explain to Lola the cause of his absence, and opening the iron gate that separated his house from the road, conducted the stranger into the park that encircled the dwelling.

They walked on till the sound of voices on the piazza came more faintly to their ear; then the gentleman said:

"My name, sir, is Penar; personally unknown to you, my mission here is to deliver to you a letter from a person you once knew—from my sister."

Justo turned towards him a perplexed and questioning face, and repeated slowly:

"Your sister, sir?"

"My sister; La Castadini."

It flashed upon Justo like lightning. He paused, and impetuously arresting Angelo's progress, cried, with sudden vehemence:

"Tell me, I beg, were you not in Paris with La Castadini about two years ago—two years last month?"

"Yes, sir; my sister was ill, and I passed a few days with her."

"And you are her brother," Justo went on, rapidly—eagerly:

"pardon me—her *own* brother?—there is so little resemblance, and it interests me much to know."

The hesitancy of a slight struggle was visible in Angelo's face, and there was a short pause before he answered; at last he said:

"No, sir; *not* her brother by blood; but yet her brother, and *nothing more.*"

Justo drew a long, deep breath, as though an insupportable weight had been lifted from him; a joyous light broke from his eyes, and for an instant a glow of hope and love banished the cold, haughty calmness of his face. He did not even try to conceal his impatient anxiety as he said:

"You bring me a letter from her, sir? Where is she? How is she?"

Angelo turned full upon him his mournful gaze.

"The letter that I bear," he said, "was written, I think, but a very little while before—" he paused, checked by Justo's startled and anguished face; and then, after a moment, went on, "*before her death.*"

No word, no sound issued from Justo's white and compressed lips. With an unconsciously imperious gesture, he signified to be neither spoken to nor followed; and walked rapidly to a tree a few yards distant, against which he leaned with averted face.

Silently contemplating him, Angelo felt some new feeling stirring at his heart.

This was the man that Naomi had so ardently, so faithfully loved: on whom she had poured out so lavishly her unbounded devotion.

After the lapse of a few moments, Justo approached. He was very—very pale.

"Pardon me, sir," he said; "there are times when we cannot hide what we feel. Will you have the kindness to deliver me her letter?"

Still bound to the little parcel, Angelo drew it from an inner pocket, and placed it in Justo's hand; then he said, quietly:

"My task is fulfilled, sir. I will now take my leave of you."

With a rapid glance Justo indicated the little rear gate of the park, within a few steps of them, and then with a sorrow too deep for words breathing from his face, silently held out his hand.

It is not given to man, however brave and noble he may be, to be altogether superior to humanity; and Angelo looked away, and made no responsive movement.

"In *her* name, sir," Justo said in a low, unsteady voice: "In *her* name!"

Ah! what was there that Angelo could have refused if asked of him *in her name!* Their hands clasped; and, in a long, steady look, their eyes met. They understood each other well. *Friends* they might not be; yet in *her* name and *above her grave* their hands might meet. With a low inclination of the head, and an unconscious look heavenward, Angelo passed through the gate, and his retreating form was soon lost in the distance.

Quietly and rapidly Justo sought the stables, equipped and mounted a horse, and bidding a little slave tell his mistress that unexpected business summoned him away, gave the rein to his horse, and, ere many minutes, was in the midst of a dense tropical forest. There he dismounted, tied his horse, and throwing himself on the ground, slowly, tremulously opened her letter, and read:

"I have been brave and strong in life. I myself may say it, since I have borne in silence the martyrdom of a long, unshared agony; but in the face of death I am weak; I cannot *die* in silence—I cannot bear this secret with me to the grave. Justo, I have so much suffered that it has worn out my strength, exhausted my courage, prostrated my pride; and I who have always so fiercely disdained pity, could find it in my heart to cry out: 'Pity me! Pity me!'

"Justo, I love you. How can I write such words, knowing

that one day your eyes will rest on them, and *not die* of *shame?* And yet there is a thrill of bliss in expressing for the first time the feeling so long imprisoned in my heart. Do not despise my weakness as I myself despise it—it is not life's but death's confession, for when you read it I shall have passed beyond the laws and judgments of this world. Think what it must have been to bear about in crowds and solitudes, for these two endless years, the burning, haunting thought of this idolatrous passion, which neither time, nor absence, nor change of place or association, could kill, or even for one brief moment lull to sleep.

"God gave me an impassioned heart; it was for you to develop all its mighty capabilities of devotion. The consciousness of the possession of your love—this, and this alone, would have been to me the most perfect of elysiums. I could have lived upon the thought to all eternity, and craved no higher bliss. Oh! never did a wearied child pine for its mother's bosom as I have pined to find rest in your love!

"Oh! the hours that I have passed within the last six months—alone, mute, crushed beneath the weight of this hopeless passion, so jealously guarded from every human eye—when it has seemed to me that my ardent sighs should traverse space to reach you, and that my yearning heart, which so imperiously demanded you, should magnetically impress you with its pain!

"Do these words seem to you unwomanly, Justo? Alas! they are poor, weak, utterly powerless. I would that there were some way that I might make you comprehend all that is in my soul; but it may not be. I might write on for ever, filling pages with vain repetition of words, but I could never image forth more than a faint reflection of what I so intensely feel. I can only say that my love for you has been the most engrossing sentiment of my existence, and that it will be the last—last memory that will float away from me in my dying hour.

"I am ill—dying, I know; and I know it with joy. We all live for something. Love, duty, or ambition must be our object

in existence. *I have nothing.* Fame and wealth are mine already; and I have no sacred duty to impose on me the obligation of living. It is true there is one charge I might take upon myself, were I stronger, more generous; but alas! all my strength has been exhausted in wrestling with fatality; and there is nothing here now save a longing wish for repose. I err—pride still lives; pride, the last thing that will die in me; and could it be my fate to live on eternally, tortured eternally, as I have been since you, Justo, first crossed my path, I should know how to endure, impassible to all save to the eye of Omnipotence.

"I pray not—I have never prayed for the annihilation of my love. All that is true must be indestructible, immortal; and would it not cause me humiliation and self-contempt to be able to think with calmness of what had caused me so many pangs?—to know that all my pain had been founded upon an illusion?

"I send back to you the handkerchief you dropped in my gondola at Venice. I have worn it in my bosom, and sometimes, but *very—very rarely, dared* to press it to my lips. Now—even now, as I write these words—I hold it to my cheek for the last time, and let my burning tears fall on it.

"You know all now. Think of me sometimes with respect and gratitude. Offer to my memory these sentiments which, living, I could not with dignity accept. Remember me as when you first saw me—gay, brilliant, happy; and if a tear fall—why it will not be unworthy of you, Justo.

"Adios! Ah! you were right; it was indeed *para siempre.* I could wish to bless you; to hope that Heaven may grant you happiness even in the arms of another—but there is something in my heart that rebels, and I cannot be a hypocrite. Adios! Adios!

"NAOMI TORRENTE."

He laid her letter to his heart; he held it to his lips and

covered it with devouring kisses; and then it fell from his cold and trembling hand. Freezing the transports of his ardent love, the thought came to him that these words, warm, palpitating with the passion that had penned them, were all that was left on earth of this great heart's illimitable love—*all—all.*

CHAPTER XXX.

Two days had passed, and Justo had not returned to his home. Lola, half frantic, had sent for his father and her own parents; ignorant as they were of whither he had gone, it was a difficult matter to make inquiries, and so, spite of their own anxiety, they strove to reassure the poor young wife with the hope that he had been unavoidably detained by business, and the heavy showers that had fallen. Lola did try to comfort herself with these suppositions, but towards the evening of the second day anxiety made her so ill that she was unable to rise from her bed. She had just sunk into an unquiet sleep, when her maid rushed in, crying out in a loud voice that the master had come. Lola had barely time to sit up and pass her hand over her eyes, when the curtain at the head of the bed was swung hastily aside, and Justo entered.

His dress had evidently been drenched, and had dried again upon his person; his hair and beard were disarranged; and his face pale, haggard, almost wild. Lola motioned to her maid to leave the room, and then held out her arms to her husband:

"Justo, where have you been? What has happened to you?"

He sat down by the bed, bowed his head upon his hand, and answered:

"I do not wish to deceive you, Lola, with false and absurd explanations. I have suffered a great, fearful sorrow; but I have borne it, and the worst is over. I can tell you nothing more about it; *you* would regret it if I did."

Love has wondrous intuitions. Lola shivered, and burst into a passion of tears.

"It is nothing that will take you from me, Justo? You love me—do you not?"

"Yes," he said sadly; "I love you, Lola; and I will make you happy if I can. I will not break your heart, as—" He checked himself, and rose with his old air of firm will.

"Think no more of this," he said. "I must go and change my dress, and invent some plausible excuse for my absence. Yes—yes, be content. I am yours."

He held her to him gently, passionlessly, as though the ardor of his nature had died within him; and left her, child-like, smiling and happy again; he going his way with slow step, and grave, pale brow, years older than when he had last seen her.

* * * * * * *
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Time rolls on, and teaches us at last, rebellious children that we are, life's hard lesson—*submission*. Justo lives, and fulfils as best he may life's duties; yet, as the true mission of all sorrow and disappointment here is to teach us to look onward and upward, he finds in one eternal remorseful regret a higher development of his spirituality. He, on whom fortune has lavished all her choicest gifts; he, who is riveted to earth by so many links, steals away from the gay circles of which he is the idol; steals from the side of his beautiful, fond wife; to gaze alone into the unfathomable depths of his glorious tropical heaven, and wonder if there be not indeed a mysterious beyond, where he may meet again, and there with no barrier between, the one rapturous love of his life.

And Angelo? He follows still his Master. It is his task to comfort the unhappy, to raise up the bowed, to pity and try to elevate the wicked. And for the rest, what matters it whether his feet tread the burning sands of the Meridian, or the icy plains of the North?—all his earthly hopes and affections are inurned with Naomi's ashes. He, too, looks above, and hopes.

Alas! what can he hope? He himself knows not. He clings, and trusts blindly, that somewhere may be solved what might almost be said to be the one great problem of existence, since it contains within itself so many others—the great, wondrous mystery of *love*.

THE END.

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